

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



April 2018

Vol. 123, No. 4

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THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON

The Genius of Sri Krishna III

What makes the value of anything in life? Not enjoyment, not possessions. Analyse everything. You will find there is no value except in experience, to teach us something. And in many cases it is our hardships that give us better experience than enjoyment. Many times blows give us better experience than the caresses of nature. According to Krishna, we are not new beings just come into existence. Our minds are not new minds. In modern times we all know that every child brings [with him] all the past, not only of humanity, but of the plant life. There are all the past chapters, and this present chapter, and there are future chapters before him. Everyone has his path mapped and sketched and planned out for him. And in spite of all this darkness, there cannot be anything uncaused—no event, no circumstance. It is simply our ignorance. The whole infinite chain of causation is bound one link to another back to nature. The whole universe is bound by that sort of chain. It is the universal [chain of] cause and effect, you receiving one link, I another. And that part is our own nature. Now Sri Krishna says: ‘Better die in your own path than attempt the path of another.’ This is my path, and I am down here. And you are way up there, and I am always tempted to give up my path thinking I will go there and be with you. And if I go up, I am neither there nor here. We must not lose sight of this doctrine. It is all [a matter of] growth. Wait and grow, and you attain everything; otherwise there will be [great spiritual danger]. Here



is the fundamental secret of religion. What do you mean by “Saving people” and all believing in the same doctrine? It cannot be. There are the general ideas that can be taught to mankind. The true teacher will be able to find out for you what your own nature is. Maybe you do not know it. It is possible that what you think is your own nature is all wrong. It has not developed to consciousness. We grope about and struggle here and there and do all sorts of things and make no progress until the time comes when we fall into that life-current and are carried on. The sign is that the moment we are in that stream we will float. Then there is no more struggle. This is to be found out. Then die in that [path] rather than giving it up and taking hold of another. Instead, we start a religion and make a set of dogmas and betray the goal of mankind and treat everyone [as having] the same nature. No two persons have the same mind or the same body. No two persons have the same religion.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*,
(Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2016), 1.459-60.



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APPEAL FOR YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

On 27 April 1901, by the invitation of Sir Henry Cotton, Chief Commissioner of Assam, Swami Vivekananda delivered his last public lecture at Quinton Hall, Shillong. Ninety-two years later, in 1993, this sacred land where the Quinton Hall stood came to the Ramakrishna Mission. To serve the youth of Northeast India, the Mission thereafter constructed the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Cultural Centre.



Presently the Cultural Centre empowers local youths by providing innovative technical training in computer software and hardware, classes on developing effective communication skills in the English, Hindi, and Khasi languages, and moral value education classes. The technical computer training is helping many students to find suitable employment. Every year more than 5,500 students receive training in computer software and hardware. In addition, local children receive classes promoting Indian culture and values, as well as developing artistic skills.



For the last 15 years the centre has trained more than 40,000 youths. Increasing demand for our training has compelled us to expand our facilities—hence the construction of a new building (G+3) on the same land was initiated with the assistance of the State and Central Government.

As the building nears its completion, a large-scale ceremony will be held on 27 April 2018. To commemorate this auspicious event, a Souvenir shall be printed and distributed, which will include reminiscences from senior monks, devotees, and well wishers. We humbly request your financial seva for the following:

1. Production of a Commemorative Souvenir – 17 lakhs
2. Expenditures for the function – 23 lakhs
3. Corpus Fund for maintenance of the new building – 56 lakhs

Donations may be sent by means of Cheque/DD in favour of “Ramakrishna Mission, Shillong”, to the address below. Our bank details are :

State Bank of India

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May Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Ma and Swami Vivekananda bless each one of you for your kind and generous support.

Yours in the Lord,
Swami Sarvabhutananda
Secretary



Ramakrishna Mission, Shillong

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RAMAKRISHNA MISSION ASHRAMA

(Headquarters : Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, (Near Kolkata)
 Dist. Howrah, West Bengal - 711 202)

**Swami Vivekananda Marg (Beed Bypass),
 AURANGABAD - 431 010.**

The Universal Temple of Bhagwan Shri Ramakrishna (Under Construction) An earnest Appeal for generous donations

Dear Sir / Madam,

Please accept our greetings and best wishes.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Aurangabad located on Swami Vivekananda Marg (Beed Bypass) is a branch center affiliated to Headquarters, Belur Math (near Kolkata). This ashrama is conducting various service activities in the field of health, education, child welfare, as well as spreading spiritual message of eternal religion as propounded by Shri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

This ashrama has taken up a new project of erecting a temple of Shri Ramakrishna. The work was commenced in December 2009; the temple will be inaugurated on **17th November 2018**.

The temple will be a unique and imposing monumental structure of its kind in entire Marathwada region in general and Aurangabad city in particular. It will add a cultural and spiritual dimension to the historical city of Aurangabad. It will be a great attraction and a place for worship, prayer, meditation and inspiration for the local people. It is also expected that the good number of general public visiting Aurangabad city as tourists for visiting world heritage sites such as Ellora & Ajanta and pilgrims for visiting Ghrishneshwar Jyotirling, Shirdi, Paithan etc. will include visit to the temple in their itinerary. It is aimed for the benefit of one and all without distinction of caste, creed, and nationality.

The estimated cost of the entire project is Rs. 25 Crores. So far Rs. 20.00 Crores have been spent through public contribution. The balance amount of Rs. 05.00 Crores is needed to complete the construction of the Temple.

We earnestly appeal to you to donate generously for this noble cause. Your support will indeed go a long way in our endeavor to erect this magnificent architectural edifice in the memory of Shri Ramakrishna who was the unique harmonizer of all the religions of the world and who dedicated his life to bring peace and welfare of mankind.

We value your help and co-operation immensely.

Yours in the service of the Lord,

Vishnupadananda

(Swami Vishnupadananda)

Secretary

Temple Inauguration Day : 17th November 2018

Details regarding participation in the inauguration function will be made available in due course.



Temple Dimensions :

Length: 156 ft. **Breadth:** 076 ft. **Height:** 100 ft.

Temple Construction Area : 18000 Sq.ft.

Garbhagriha : 24ft. x 24ft.

Temple Hall for Prayer and Meditation :

70ft. x 40ft. Seating Capacity - 450

Auditorium (Ground Floor) :

80ft. x 57ft. Seating Capacity - 500

The entire Temple will be built in Chunar sandstone and interior in Ambaji and Makarana marble. Ceiling of the Temple Hall will be done in Teak Wood

Estimated Cost : Rs. 25 Crores

We accept Online donations. You may please credit your donation directly on our Online State Bank of India, MIT Branch, Aurangabad, A/c No. 30697728250, (Branch Code : 10791, IFSC Code:- SBIN0010791) We request Online donors to intimate us, on our email id (rkmaurangabad@gmail.com) his / her full Postal Address, Amount, PAN & Mobile Number. This is very important.

Kindly Note :

- 1) Cheque / D.D. should be drawn in favour of "Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama", Aurangabad.
- 2) Donations are eligible for tax exemption under section 80-G of I.T. Act 1961.

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Appeal for Sadhu Seva

Dear Friends,

In 1915, a branch of Ramakrishna Math (Hdq. Belur Math, W. Bengal) was started to cater to the coastal town of Koyilandy in the north Malabar region of Kerala. Since then the Ramakrishna Math, Koyilandi, has been serving in its humble way the fishermen communities who constitute the major populace of the town. Poor housing, sanitation, education facilities, and low income, besides other difficulties make the lives of



these people quite hard and difficult. The Koyilandi centre presently runs a non-formal education centre for 60 deprived children, providing coaching in school subjects along with nutritious food; free distribution of textbooks and scholarships to about 700 poor students and pecuniary aid to the needy; occasional youth camps and cultural programmes for students, and a small library—besides regular puja at the shrine and the observance of sacred days.

To carry on these activities, the monks of the Ashrama need a modestly furnished Monks' Quarter. The present building is much old and beyond repairs. We require Rs.32 lakhs (approx.) to do this. We sincerely seek help from all of you in this respect. All donations to us are exempted from Income Tax u/s 80G of IT Act, 1961.

Account payee cheque or bank draft drawn in favour of 'Ramakrishna Math, Koyilandy' may kindly be sent to us by registered post. Or you may also credit your kind donation through bank transfer (with due intimation to us by email or post) to: For donors in India: Kerala. Bank a/c.no.10632417896 IFS Code:SBIN0003338, SWIFT For donors from abroad: Kerala. Bank a/c.no.10632417921, IFS Code:SBIN0003338 SWIFT

Wish good wishes and prayers,
Swami Sundarananda
Adhyaksha



Ramakrishna Math

(A branch centre of Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math)

Swami Vivekananda Road, P.O.Melur, Koyilandy

Dt. Kozhikode, Kerala, E-mail: koyilandy@rkmm.org, Phone: 0496-2630990

TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Maitrayaniya Upanishad

April 2018
Vol. 123, No. 4

मैत्रायणीयोपनिषत्

अथान्यत्राप्युक्तं विश्वभृद्वै नामैषा तनूर्भगवतो विष्णोर्यदिदमन्नं प्राणो वा अन्नस्य रसो मनः प्राणस्य विज्ञानं मनस आनन्दं विज्ञानवानानन्दवांश्च भवति यो हैवं वेद यावन्तीह वै भूतान्यन्नमदन्ति तावत्स्वन्तःस्थोऽन्नमन्ति यो हैवं वेद । अन्नमेव विजरन्नमन्नं संवननं स्मृतं । अन्नं पशूनां प्राणोऽन्नं ज्येष्ठमन्नं भिषक् स्मृतं ।

॥६.१३॥

Athanyatrapy-uktam vishva-bhrid-vai namaisha tanur-bhagavato vishnor-yad-idam-annam prano va annasya raso manah pranasya vijnanam manasa anandam vijnanavan-anandavanshcha bhavati yo haivam veda yavantiha vai bhutany-annam-adanti tavatsv-antahstho'nnam-atti yo haivam veda. Annam-eva vijarannam-annam samvananam smritam. Annam pashunam prano'nnam jyeshtamannam bhishak smritam. (6.13)

And thus it has been said elsewhere: That born of the blessed Vishnu which is called the all-supporting, that, indeed, is this food. Life, indeed, is the essence of food, mind of life, understanding of mind, bliss of understanding. One who knows this becomes possessed of food, life, mind, understanding, and bliss. Whatever creatures here on earth eat food, abiding in them does one, who knows this, eat food. Food, indeed, prevents decay, food is worshipful, it is said. Food is the life of animals, food is the eldest-born, food is the physician, it is said. (6.13)

THIS MONTH

WHAT IS THE PERFECT BODY? Is it possible for us to acquire a perfect shape? What is the balanced approach to physical health? These issues are discussed in **The Body Obsession**.

Non-attachment is an integral virtue of spiritual life. There is a great deal of misconception about non-attachment, what is true and what is false. Swami Pavitrananda, former Minister-in-charge, Vedanta Society of New York discusses **Non-attachment, True and False**. This is an edited transcript of a talk delivered on 21 February 1954.

Swami Muktidananda, Adhyaksha of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Uttarakhand, a trustee of Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, and a member of the governing body of Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math details the beginnings of **The Ramakrishna Movement in Goa**. This is an edited version of the talk given by him at the inauguration of the Ramakrishna Mission in Goa on 28 May 2017.

Some class notes on the Upanishads were given on Wednesday evenings by Revered Swami Shraddhananda, former Minister-in-charge, Vedanta Society of Sacramento, in 1979. These class notes were taken down in shorthand in 1979 by Cleo aka Satyamayi Anderson and were transcribed many years later with the help of others. The notes are not verbatim and have been edited by Lali Maly and the first instalment is being given in **Meditations on the Upanishads**.

The varied views regarding what Sri

Ramakrishna says about who Swami Vivekananda was have been analysed in the light of scriptures by Swami Vishvarupananda in **The Meaning of Sri Ramakrishna's Statements about Swami Vivekananda in the Light of Scriptures**. It has been translated from the original Bengali to English by P Usha, a volunteer at the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, Varanasi. This article was culled and the translation was arranged by Swami Kamalananda, Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Varanasi.

Swami Satyapriyananda, Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math discusses about **The First of January, 1886 and its Anniversary**.

Many wonderful nuggets of wisdom contained in ancient scriptures are difficult to understand. In *Balabodha*, such ancient wisdom is made easy. This month's topic is **Deva**. Understanding this popular word is necessary to understand its meaning.

Some events can change our beliefs and make us to believe something that we did not believe earlier. This is shown in **The Miracle that Brought Faith**. This story is this month's *Traditional Tales* and has been translated from the Tamil book *Arulneri Kathaigal*.

David J Helfand, former chair of the Department of Astronomy at Columbia University, visiting scientist at the Danish Space Research Institute, and Sackler Distinguished Visiting Astronomer at Cambridge University, has written the book **A Survival Guide to the Misinformation Age**. From this book, we bring you this month's *Manana*.

The Body Obsession

THE WORLD HAS CHANGED. That is nothing new, but we see a completely different change. Every locality has a gym coming up with all people—truly all people, in all sizes and shapes—taking it upon them to achieve that perfect shape that probably none has achieved. What is it with this rush to the gyms? Why has everyone suddenly become so conscious of their appearance? Simple. We live in a world of make-believe. The card-towers of our lives are shattered with a whiff of the wind. And how did we get to here? Simple again. Not only do we live in a world of make-believe, but we are also gullible enough to believe anything that we are made to!

That idiot box called TV or its recent twin, the computer, and that increasingly essential human part called the mobile phone have whipped out a solution to practically all our problems. Or have they? Are you suffering from obesity? Here is your magic pill, just pop it and your weight will pop its way out! So comforting! It is a pity no one tells us about the life-endangering side-effects of that pill. Though there are advertisements, which are mostly staged, of people, who have miraculously shed dozens of kilograms in amazingly short times, no one is telling about the numerous people, who are suffering various ailments because of the weight-reduction drugs. So, should we not be conscious of our body-weight and fitness? We should be, by all means, yes! However, the present-day problem is that we are overdoing it.

Being fit does not mean one has to obsess over the calories that one consumes through every

piece of food. Being fit does not mean that one cannot eat some foods, oily, spicy, or sweet, on occasions for celebration or for having a good

Our image of ourselves should not be merely one of our bodies

time. Being fit does not mean that one has to appoint a trainer or go to a gym. Being fit is all about understanding the bio-rhythm of the body. It is about understanding the small signs, alerts, and alarms that the body gives us when something needs attention. The regularity of food and rest times, a regular amount of exercise, and immediately heeding to body alarms are the main things that would lead to good health.

Most people who take to crash programmes of weight reduction forget that it needs an equal, if not more, time to reduce weight as the time it takes to put it on in the first place. No shortcuts are going to help us there. And there is no one perfect body shape. It is alright to have different bodies, and it is pathological to hate one's own body. Our bodies are the reflections of our thoughts and actions, and if we need to change our bodies, the change has to begin with our minds and actions. Mere dressing up the body or reducing flabs would be just eyewash. Enough fluid intakes, sufficient rest, enough leisure, and good company of loved ones can do more good to the body than a horde of doctors or diet plans ever can.

One should avoid eating for stupid excuses like bad moods. One should avoid overt fixation

with specific foods. And the most important of all, one should avoid skipping meals. Skipping meals is one of the causes of weight increase, as is lack of sleep, and insufficiency of water in the body. If however, you sometimes botch it up and are unable to maintain this list of things to avoid, it is alright. The world has not ended for you, and nothing serious will happen. It is more important to be happy and calm than to be rigidly adhering to a don'ts list. We need to remember that food is not the only villain in the problem of obesity. Researchers continuously show the importance of lifestyle choices for people who are obese. Also, in programmes intending to reduce obesity, weight loss is wrongly seen as the only criteria. This needs to change. We need to include other factors like the satisfaction of the person with the programme and quality of life.

If you measure up your body every now and then if you fuss about the calories that your food contains, if you avoid many dishes even at the cost of social awkwardness, if you are obsessed with diets, then beware you have already become the latest victim of the body epidemic!

The body image of a person is something that haunts one unless one has a greater conception of one's personality. The popular media has been feeding us with ideal and mostly impossible images of body that we try to emulate in vain. When it becomes clear that such a utopian body image is out of our grasp, we become depressed and all the effort we took to reduce weight by trying to maintain an impossible diet plan is thrown to the wind and ironically, the obsession with an ideal body image becomes the very reason for eating unhealthy food and becoming obese. It is alright to have a body that is not picture perfect. Most people don't have picture-perfect bodies. The sooner we understand this and live with it, the better it would be good for our lives and psychological well-being.

Having a positive self-esteem is of the utmost importance if we have to not be obsessed with our body. One of the first things that this needs is that we treat body with respect no matter, how ugly it might look in the popular perception. We should never try to control our body rather, we should eat healthy food and exercise regularly because that would keep our body healthy and would also make us feel good. Our world view should not be one that judges every person or even an object based just on its form. We should not try to fit in clothes not designed for the present state of the bodies. Just like we do not wear the clothes that we wore when we were children, we should not try to wear clothes that we used when we were of a different form. We should ignore the critical comments or the critical outlook people have on particular body shapes. We should be careful not to be apologetic about our body shape, no matter what the ideal body shape is according to popular perception.

We should avoid having negative thoughts about ourselves. We should not worry about our body and appearance. We should also not worry about our achievements in life. Achieving a particular body form should never be our aim at any time of our lives. We should keep ourselves company with people who care for us and would not be worried about our body shape.

Our image of ourselves should not be merely one of our bodies. We are much more than the perishable aggregate of flesh, blood, and all the other nauseating matter that rests under the misleading veneer of our skin. To understand this and to develop self-esteem that is not shattered by the amount of wealth or physical beauty that we possess, should be the first step towards acquiring a meaningful purpose in life, which would enable us to live a happy life that is focussed on attaining higher natures of our self.



Non-Attachment, True and False

Swami Pavitrananda

If we understand the giving up the world in its old, crude sense, then it would come to this: that we must not work, that we must be idle, sitting like lumps of earth, neither thinking nor doing anything, but must become fatalists, driven about by every circumstance, ordered about by the laws of nature, drifting from place to place. That would be the result. But that is not what is meant. We must work. Ordinary mankind driven everywhere by false desire, what do they know of work? The man propelled by his own feelings and his own senses, what does he know of work? He works, who is not propelled by his own desires, by any selfishness whatsoever. He works, who has no ulterior motive in view. He works, who has nothing to gain from work.

Who enjoys the picture, the seller or the seer? The seller is busy with his accounts, computing what his gain will be, how much profit he will realise from the picture. His brain is full of that. He is looking at the hammer, and watching the bids. He is intent on hearing how fast the bids are rising. That man is enjoying the picture who has gone there without any intention of buying or selling. He looks at the picture and enjoys it. So this whole universe is a picture, and when these desires have vanished, men will enjoy the world, and then this buying and selling and these foolish ideas of possession will be ended.¹

THERE IS A GREAT DEAL of misconception about non-attachment, what is true and what is false. Well, the world in its ordinary sense, as it is viewed by us, is a mixture of truth and falsehood. We do not know what is

true, really, nor do we know what is false. This world is a mixture of good and evil.

Anything you do can be criticised and it can be argued that there is something wrong in it. Others will say there is something good in it, and so we are in this dilemma. It is a mixture of good and evil, of truth and falsehood, and we do not know the mystery of this existence. We do not know what is right. Actually, we do not know, in the ordinary sense.

It is a paradox. Swami Vivekananda used to say that a perfect world is a paradox: “A good world”, “a happy world”, and “social progress”, are all terms equally intelligible with “hot ice” or “dark light”. If it were good, it would not be the world’ (8.384).

Why is it such a mixture? Why do we not know what is good? Why do we not know what is truth? It is because we identify ourselves completely with the things we see, and our personal feelings are so much involved that we cannot see the Truth. We have neither the capacity nor the opportunity to see a thing in its true perspective. Since we, ourselves, are involved, we cannot look at a thing objectively, as a scientist looks at his work.

The scientist looks at his problems free from personal prejudice, free from his personal feelings; he wants to find out the truth, and he is extremely austere in his search. This might not hold in his everyday life, but in his scientific work personal feelings are not there, and he wants to see the truth and nothing but truth.

In the same way, there must be great austerity

in our thoughts just to look at things objectively. Usually, we cannot do that, and that is the difficulty. We cannot separate ourselves from the Truth which we want to see. It always happens. When we are involved ourselves, we cannot see the Truth. A doctor cannot attend his patients when his personal feelings are too much involved.

I had such an experience. We had a great devotee in India, a doctor. He liked all of us so much that he would become nervous when he found that we were sick or there was any trouble with us. I was once slightly ill in Calcutta. The doctor came, and he said, 'Well! What is the matter? What will happen?'

I simply laughed at him. 'Why do you say that? Tonight I shall be on a diet, and tomorrow you will find that I am all right.'

He felt much relieved. 'Let that be so.'

On another occasion he did the same thing. He almost diagnosed wrongly, his feelings were so much involved. When personal feelings are involved, we cannot do the right thing. We must be able to look at things sternly, with great austerity.

This is true, also, with religion. We have no freedom of thought, even in religion, because our personal feelings, our false loyalty to the organisation sometimes is involved. We are pledged to a certain creed, and therefore we do not have the freedom to stand erect and look at truth objectively.

It has been said that in America there are 395 denominations of Protestants, 395 schools of thought, and each thinks that it is right and the others wrong. If each would think that it is right, and the others are also right, as much as it is, that would have been a great thing. Everybody is free to think in his own way, but here, each think that it is right, and the others wrong. Why is it so? They are accustomed to think in a particular way, and they are so much involved in this

organisation, in their particular churches, that they cannot think that others are right.

Well, Truth does not pay homage to tradition, to loyalty to any organisation, or loyalty to anything. Truth is Truth. We must be able to separate ourselves from our personal feelings. That is what is called non-attachment, when we are not attached to things that way, but are attached to Truth and nothing but Truth.

And the first difficulty arises. We are so much involved with our personal feelings that we cannot see the Truth. So in the world, also, we cannot see the truth. We are involved, too much involved, and we cannot separate ourselves from the circumstances in which we live. We do not have the right perspective, what to speak of the daring spirit to follow the Truth. So that is the reason there must be no-attachment, the capacity to separate ourselves and look at things objectively and do things objectively.

When the scientist experiments, he does it objectively. This is true, and it should be done. When a surgeon operates on a patient he does it objectively. He has no feelings for the immediate sufferings of the patient. If he does, his hands will shake, he will become nervous and fall into a fit, unable to do his work. So, we must be able to look at things objectively, just for Truth and nothing but Truth.

What is this world we are in? What is the nature of this universe? The Gita puts it in a very nice way, in an allegory. It says, 'It is like a tree, a big banyan tree. Every moment it is changing, but it is everlasting. It lasts almost eternally.'²

Yes, this universe is going on, though every moment it is changing. And this big banyan tree has many, many roots, for banyan trees have many roots growing from the branches to the ground. The biggest banyan tree in the world is near Calcutta, and it has many roots. This world is like a big banyan tree with hundreds of



roots attached to the ground. Our feelings are attached to this world by hundreds of tendrils, roots and branches. This is the universe, and we do not know what its nature is. We are all in darkness, although we think we are wide awake.

And what should be done? The Gita says: 'You must cut out the roots of this tree with non-attachment; you must cut them out with determination, with a firm hand' (15.3–4). We must separate ourselves from this tree, and then we can see the Truth, we can find out what the real nature of the universe is.

And how does this attachment arise? What is its cause? The Gita says that when we work, these are the things involved; our body, our identification with the body, our senses, our sense organs, and another factor which we do not know (18.14). That is the important thing, which we do not know. When in an experiment, there is a slight mistake somewhere, we cannot ignore it. There is a tendency for students to say, 'Let us ignore it. This is a slight thing.' No. That is the most important thing, for that is where evil arises. And whereas all these things are involved,

when we work, we identify ourselves completely with this body. When we say 'I', we do not know what 'I' is. But usually, we identify ourselves with this body, and if necessary, we will do anything for our bodily comfort.

What are we doing in our life? What is the root cause of all our struggles? Ultimately, it is selfishness in most cases. We want comfort for our body or mind. In the Gita, body and mind come to the same thing, the same material things. We are identified with this, and that is the root cause of attachment.

But, if one speaks of non-attachment, at once the thought will arise, 'What are we to do? Should we give up all work? Should we give up all idea of the body?' As Swamiji said, 'Should we be idle and daydreaming?'

Well, we cannot do it that way. In the first place, it is not possible for us to do it, and then, it would not give us any result. It is something like, 'Burn the whole house, and you will drive away the mosquitoes', as they say in Bengal. In Bengal villages, there are lots of mosquitoes. And what do they do? In the evening, they

have a little fire and the mosquitoes go there and burn themselves, or, because of fire and smoke, the mosquitoes go away. Some persons think, 'Burn the house altogether, and you will get rid of the mosquitoes.'

In the same way, because attachment is the source of all trouble, are we to commit suicide, as it were? No work at all? That does not mean real non-attachment. 'Well, you can have immortality,' it is said, 'You can conquer death when you can face death a thousand times.' By flying away from death; you cannot conquer death. That person alone conquers death who has the courage and grit to face death a thousand times.

In the same way, we cannot escape from attachment simply by flying away from work and sitting idle. By plunging headlong into work we can conquer attachment. It seems paradoxical, but it is true. Of course, we must know how to do it in the right spirit.

It is said that of all the arts, tragedy is the most triumphant and most vigorous, because in tragedy we enter into the very citadel of the enemy. We want to see the darker side of life, and when we see what it is, all fear vanishes. And so, of all the arts, tragedy is the most triumphant.

In the same way, by escaping from work, we drain ourselves of work; we do not escape from work, escape from the bondage of attachment. We must go headlong into the work and face it.

When you see a ghost somewhere, and are afraid, just face it; go and see what it is, and when you find that it is not there, you will see that it was your wrong conception.

By the same way, we must plunge headlong into work, and, of course, we must find out the right method of work, how to do it in a proper spirit. That is the difficulty, since we go to work, and we are at fault. But we must do the work in such a way that we get the maximum benefit out of it. It is by facing death that we conquer

death, and by facing work we conquer our spirit of attachment.

It is said, 'When there is no attachment,, how can there be detachment?' We must find out. The person who is inert and idle, who has no liking for any work, who cannot move his fingers or do any work, how can he learn the utility of non-attachment? Well, he is sub-human, you see. His attachment is so much within himself, he does not know the value of non-attachment; the hankering for non-attachment has not come to him at all.

So we must work first, before we can learn the art of non-attachment. And how to do that in a simple way? Just think, when we do any work, that two things are involved. First, our personal purpose for work. It might be we like work, or perhaps it is our means of livelihood. And there is another thing involved, the joy of doing the work in a nice way.

Yes, there is something personal, some selfish motive in this. For our immediate purpose we want to work and we choose our work for that. But there is another thing involved, the joy of doing a thing in a right way. Even a servant, when he works and whatever he does, when he does it in a nice way, forgetting that he is working for pay or salary, when he does that work in the most perfect way that he can; he finds joy in it. And there it is; to that extent he is working without any attachment.

His work is for his pay but as far as this part of the work is concerned, it is to find joy from his work by doing it in the best way that is possible for him. There is real non-attachment. Here he is projecting the creative power of God through human effort; he is creating something, and he finds joy in it.

As Swamiji said, 'Who enjoys the picture more?' He who has no selfish motive. The artist enjoys the picture most when he works simply for the art's sake, for the joy of creating

something beautiful. When he is too much involved in considerations of money, he cannot find joy. If he always wants to find joy in his work without looking for admiration, appreciation, or money value, which is worse, he does find joy in it, and his best work comes out.

In the same way, real non-attachment is just to do work for the joy of doing work, not so much for the secondary considerations which we put first in life. If we do whatever we do for the joy of it; wherever we are, we will find there is joy in doing it in a perfect way. If it is a vocation, let us find out how to serve people by our work, and there will be joy in it.

Sometimes I would think, 'Why, what is the difference between a person who earns money and a monk who does not work for money?' Sometimes, I would really think that way. But, let us say, here is a person who gets a small wage, and there is a monk who does not work for money. Why should there be so much difference? The difference is that when a person works for money, he makes that money the uppermost thing in his life. And a true monk will do the work for the joy of doing that work. The money consideration is nothing for him; he finds joy in doing work. I have seen monks work with so much devotion it is surprising to see.

So, if this money consideration does not come uppermost in our mind if we do the work for the joy of it, we become non-attached, and it is called, 'working through non-attachment'. It is said that our prayer in leisure moments does not compensate for doing work in a slipshod manner throughout the whole day. If we can do the work with earnestness, for the joy of it, not in the religious sense, in the right way, right morally, philosophically, psychologically, and for our own selves, that is real non-attachment. And we grow spiritually when we fulfil these laws, when we do the work in a perfect way.

That should be the main consideration in our life, wherever we are. We should not think that nobody is watching us, and that we need not do the work perfectly. If one is a servant, if one is an employee, let him not think that there is no supervision and that he need not do it as perfectly as his employer wants it. We cannot cheat the employer that way. We are deceiving ourselves spiritually and morally. But we should do it in the best way that can be done, even if we get low pay, even if we are a member of a union that can fight the employer because they do not give high enough pay. That is a different thing. When there is a fight for higher wages, go, fight for that. But when we work, it is not a question of small scale of pay. We should do it in the most perfect way that is possible, because there our spiritual life is involved. Thereby, we separate ourselves from the monetary reward of the work. Do it in the most perfect way that is possible without having personal feelings involved in it, just as the scientist does work in a laboratory, to find out the truth. That is the secret, and it is a simple thing, if one can follow it.

Someone will say, 'It is a natural thing to think that way, but a practical problem arises. Can you do work earnestly if you do it in a spirit of non-attachment?' If there is no personal interest, can we do the work in a right way? Shall we have any interest in any work? That is a practical problem with which we are faced when we want to work with non-attachment.

Well, it is not that we do not want any result; rather, we want a much bigger result; a result so big that we cannot express it in any worldly terms. We don't care for any money value, and we don't care for appreciation from people. But we do expect a result, much bigger than any human terms can express. We want to find out the Truth behind this universe.

As I said, this world is a mixture of truth and

falsehood. We are in some position, but we do not know what it is. We want to know the Truth, to solve the mystery of existence, and we want to have the Truth and nothing but Truth. We can no longer tolerate this mixture of Truth and untruth. We want to have something more, something better than the ordinary meaning of good and evil. Yes, we do want a result, a much bigger result, the cultivation of our spiritual life.

What does it mean, this cultivation of spiritual life? Ultimately, it means this: to find out the Truth, the Absolute Truth, Truth that is no longer a mixture of Truth and falsehood, of good and evil. So, when we have hankering for that greater result, when the goal of our life is to know that, we find greater incentive. It is not that we don't have any incentive; it means that where our attention is, that is what we want in life.

Yes, if we simply want money value, we will get it. But these are the things involved, that we do not find real happiness that way. When our personal interest is involved, we do it, but our heart is lacerated afterwards. We are torn to pieces in this way, if we work simply from selfish motives.

One person said on the radio program, 'What I Believe', 'Well I do things in the best way possible, and I lose no effort to aid others wherever I am. That gives me peace, and helps to make it unnecessary for me to go to a psychiatrist.' He was the head of some business administration, and was not a particularly religious man, but what he said was so true. If we do not know the art of doing work, we are torn to pieces, however hard we may work.

So here, we have a higher incentive to realise Truth, to realise the goal of life, or, in ordinary language, to solve this mystery. Why is this world a mixture of Truth and falsehood? We do not know what we are nor where we are. And if we

work that way, our purpose is that. And it is a legitimate purpose, not a big theology or religion, true or false.

This hankering comes within the mind of everyone. Why are we in such a plight? Why are we in such a helpless condition? We must make an end of it, and find out the reality behind these things. As I said before, the greatest citadel is tragedy. We see the evil, we enter the citadel of the enemy and see what it is, and see what life is. That is our goal, and that is the greatest incentive by which we work. If we do not have the right attitude, we do not know the secret. What happens? Our life is full of vain regrets for the past and our worries for the future. We are always in a helpless condition. It is natural. Suppose an artist always thinks of how much money he will get. When he paints, he does not think of his paintings so much as of how much money he will get. The value of his painting depends on many factors. It depends on the market value, on the purchasing power of money, and so on. But he does not find peace, because he thinks that way. Our life is full of pain and worry because we do not know the art of doing action.

There is another way, sometimes an easier way, of doing the same thing with non-attachment. Our attachment goes to something else. Here, as I said, it is not that we do not want any reward, for we want a much higher reward, much higher than human language can express. We want that and our incentive is there.

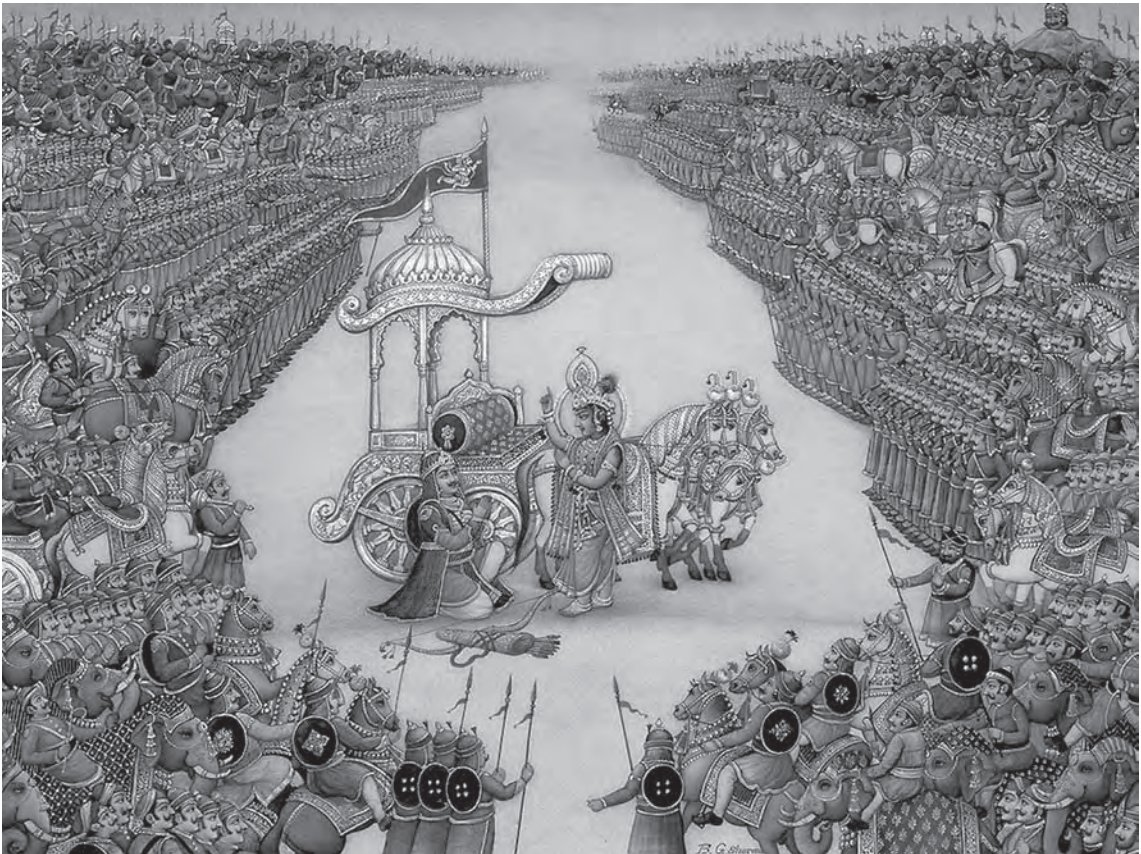
Another way is when we work for God, if we have love for God. We work for God, not for an employer if we get some money. But even then we work for God. Forget the idea we are working for an employer. Any work that comes along is our spiritual treasure, if we work in a right way, if we are working for God. Any work that comes along. Why should it only be morning prayers and evening prayers? All actions

should be done for God, as in the presence of God. If we just find out our philosophy, that gives us non-attachment. Non-attachment is not a negative term; it is something positive. As I said, we aspire after a result so big that human language cannot express it. Here also, our attachment is so big that no human language can express it. Ordinarily, we cannot understand how attachment to God can give us so much incentive to work, but it can when we do every action for God.

There is a prayer in Sanskrit, which says:

Whatever work I do, whatever I think,
Whatever I remember in my waking moments
In my dreams or in my deep sleep,
Everything, let everything be offered to Thee,
Oh Lord.

Just see, the result of everything, good and evil. Usually when we do something wrong and have to face the consequences, we are afraid. For our good actions, we easily forget the result. But, we should offer everything to God, the good and bad results of our actions, and we should do everything for the love of God. We are here just to feel the presence of God. Just prepare the ground in that way, and offer everything to God. Let us do the work conscientiously, as far as we can, but let the result be offered to God. In that way, it becomes much more smooth, because our emotions find some expression. Here, we do not go with the austerity of a scientist's thought. As I said, the scientist has a very austere outlook as far as truth is concerned. But here, we work with love, we work for God.



And another thing, when we say we must work with non-attachment, it does not mean that we learn the art of non-attachment and then work. We do not go to a school to learn what non-attachment is, and then go into the work, as if we put on armour and go into the battlefield protected. We cannot learn the art of swimming in a classroom on land. It cannot be done. We should get into the water, and while in the water struggle and learn the art of swimming. In the same way, when we are in action, if we are careful, we will learn the art of non-attachment through the process of the action. We cannot learn the art of non-attachment without being in the work, since it must begin in the work. So we need not think that we shall have perfect knowledge of non-attachment and that when we go to work we shall apply a formula, one, two, three. We get right into the water, and we struggle for life, and learn how to swim.

In the same way, non-attachment cannot be learned in a vacuum. It must be learned in the world of action. We go to the action, right into the whirlpool of action, and try to learn it. It is learned exactly that way, being in the action, and not from the outside. Only if we know that these are the things to be taken care of, and that our goal is something else, will we find it easy to learn the art of non-attachment.

And after all, what is the value of our attachment? When we do action in a right way, and learn the secret of work also, we find, usually, that we are simply tools. We are simply spokes in a great wheel, a part of the great machinery which is called the universe. God is the great actor, and we are simply part of that acting. But we want to make God a partner in our business; we do not like to make ourselves a partner in the business of God. That is the difference. We want to make God the partner in our business so that


we may be successful. We forget that there is a great acting going on, and we are simply a part of that great acting. On the contrary, we should try to make ourselves partners of God's business in this universe.

A recent book said, 'Let us make God the co-pilot in our life, in our great journey through the space of life.' We don't say that we should be a co-pilot in the activity of God. But God should not be dragged down to help our business. We must try ourselves to rise up so that we may become the partner in the great business of God. Great acting is going on, and we are here just to play the part which God allotted to us. If we do not do that; we always strike a jarring note in the acting, and we suffer. But when we can play in perfect rhythm in that great music of God, we do not suffer. We find peace, and we give peace to others.

In the Gita, Sri Krishna says:

In the whole world, I have nothing to realise;
and nothing to lose, but still I always act.
I act for the love of it, for the joy of it (3.22).

Yes, this universe, they say, is the joy of God's creation. Because of joy, the joy of creating something, God created this universe. We do not know how and why the universe was created, but still it is a good idea to know that this universe was created for the joy of it, as an artist creates his work for the joy of it.

So, let us do work for the love of it, for the joy of it, for the joy of doing work for God's sake. In that way, we shall have perfect non-attachment; we shall know the utility of working with non-attachment. 

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2. Gita, 15.1.

The Ramakrishna Movement in Goa

Swami Muktidananda



Shrine at Ramakrishna Mission, Goa

[An edited version of the talk given by the author at the inauguration of the Ramakrishna Mission in Goa on 28 May 2017—*Editor*.]

TODAY IS A VERY UNIQUE DAY and a unique epoch in the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement in the sense that Goa has its own unique and tremendous multicultural and religio-spiritual history right from the Shalivahanas onwards till the Gowani Sultans, Kadambas, and Rashtrakutas—so many have ruled this place. I have gone through the history of Goa. And finally, it was under the Portuguese foreign rule for a long, long time till the 1960s, when only Indians retrieved Goa. Yesterday,

Captain Surway was telling how India fought to send the Portuguese away from Goa, even after the post-independent war to capture Goa.

The Ramakrishna Movement has some unique features like its all-inclusivity, deep spirituality, yet service-orientation; service as an expression of spirituality, not as mere social service. And, the harmony of religions, the ability to accept all, accommodate all, and reject none. That is the uniqueness of the Ramakrishna Movement, which is global, universal, but deeply pan-Indian, having along with other things, the pristine, pure, waters of Indian religion. And which can co-mingle with any colour, any shade.

Inauguration of Ramakrishna Mission, Goa





The Ashrama Premises

Such is the broad spectrum of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, which is universal in nature. That is because of the seed in the form of the *tapasya*, spiritual austerities of Sri Ramakrishna, who descended down to bring about a spiritual renaissance, a new spirituality, where God becomes real. Sri Ramakrishna's spirituality is focused first on God, and through God, the world will be seen. One sees the world as God, not world as world. That is what Sri Ramakrishna interpreted as '*Shiva jnane jiver seva*; worship of the *jiva* knowing it to be Shiva'. That is the unique spiritual dispensation of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, which is now touching the soil of Goa, which has been sanctified by Swami Vivekananda's touch.

One can imagine through the mind's eye, how Swamiji must have wandered about Goa, how he might have sat in some of the libraries run by the Christian missionaries and pored over books on Christian monasticism. One could imagine how he understood that India needed a great organising power. Swamiji wandered through different

The Ashrama Premises



parts of India and passed through Goa. It is in Goa that he captured the idea that all the spiritual movements are spread out and in conflict and that there was no integration. So, Swamiji wanted a broad spiritual canvas and an organised monasticism. He studied Buddhist and Christian monasticism and worked out a synthesis of that based on the modern outlook. From Goa, Swamiji went to Bombay and visited the Kanheri caves. In the Thousand Island park in the US, he visualises an Indian monastery.

Swamiji reached Goa by train and got down at Margao on 27 October 1892. His biographers have unearthed information about his Goa visit:

Something of the Swami's visit to Goa is also known from an article published in the Hindu of January 19, 1964. The author, Shri V. S. Sukhthanker, writes:

Swami Vivekananda, during his peregrination in India, happened to stop at Belgaum, where he expressed a desire to visit Goa to Dr. V. V. Shirgaonker, a prominent citizen of the city with whom he came into close contact. This was no ordinary visit, for he had a special purpose in mind. Dr. Shirgaonker wrote to Subrai Naik, his learned friend in Margao-goia, to kindly be at the service of Swamiji.

The day on which Swamiji alighted at the railway station of Margao, he was received by hundreds of people who had come to accord him welcome. Seated in a horse carriage, he was taken in procession to the house of his host Subrai Naik.

Subrai Naik who was a scholar in Sanskrit and well versed in Hindu scriptures was naturally charmed by Swamiji's extraordinary intellect and the depth of his religious knowledge. Having come to know that the main object of his distinguished guest in visiting Goa was to study Christian theology from old Latin texts and manuscripts which were unavailable elsewhere in India, Subrai Naik invited a learned Christian friend, J. P. Alvares, and introduced

him to Swamiji who had a talk with him on this subject in Latin [?]. Alvares who was greatly impressed by Swamiji's erudition, immediately made special arrangements for him to stay at the Rachol Seminary, the oldest convent - college of theology in Goa, four miles away from Margao, where rare religious literature in manuscripts and printed works in Latin [are] preserved.

Swamiji spent three days in this seminary assiduously perusing all the important theological works that he found there. His gigantic intellect and original views about Christianity based on sound knowledge were indeed a marvel to the Father Superior and to other Padres and also to all students of this Seminary.

On his return to Margao, visits to Swamiji from Padres even from distant places became a regular occurrence and they even took part

enthusiastically in the farewell meeting organized by the Hindus in the town to honour this Hindu monk on the eve of his departure.

The Swami's host in Margao, Shri Subrai Naik, besides being a Sanskrit scholar, was a well-known Ayurveda physician. The guest was put up in a room adjoining the temple of Damodarji, the Family deity. The room, together with whatever the Swami used, has been preserved to this day as a memorial of his visit. One day, it is said, the Swami sang some devotional songs and was accompanied on the Tabla by a reputed Tabla-player named Kharupji. After the singing was over, the Swami spoke to Kharupji of his habit of distorting his face while playing on the Tabla. He said that one could play on the Tabla without making faces; but Kharupji said that that was impossible. Then the Swami

Rachol Seminary, Goa where Swami Vivekananda Stayed



himself played on the Tabla and showed that it is possible.

On the eve of the guest's departure Mr. Naik asked the Swami for a photograph of himself, to keep alive the memory of his visit.¹

This photograph is 'still preserved by the descendants of Sri Naik'.² Swamiji's stay at the Rachol Seminary has been recognised and by 'the initiative of some admirers of Swamiji, a colourful portrait of Swamiji was mounted at a prominent place in Seminary Library sometime back' (44).

To cherish Swamiji's memory and also to do service activities as shown by him, Surendra D Prabhu offered the first floor of his house to start a centre of service in Madgao, Goa. This led to the formation of the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Seva Samiti, which was inaugurated on 25 April 1996 by Swami Gahananandaji. In 2006, this Samiti acquired six acres of land in a more suited place. The Samiti gifted this land to the Ramakrishna Mission on 28 May 2017. Surendra D Prabhu also gifted to the Ramakrishna Mission 3,993 square feet of land adjacent to the Samiti.

A devotee-couple Upendra Gaunekar and Devyani Gaunekar donated to the Ramakrishna

Mission, 5,070 square feet of land in Ponda, Goa and another devotee-couple Vishnudas Kamat and Manisha Kamat have donated to the Ramakrishna Mission 2,820 square feet of land adjacent the land donated by Prabhu.

New Beginnings

The buildings needed for the Ramakrishna Mission at Goa are under construction. Swami Hridananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, Goa said that there is an orchard in the premises, which has to be cleared before the construction begins. A boys' hostel, a charitable dispensary, a cultural hall, and a monks' quarters are being constructed on that land. The entire cost of construction would be about fifty lakhs.

This is a branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission, headquartered at Belur Math, Howrah District, West Bengal. The memory of Swamiji's visit to Goa can be well preserved if the Ramakrishna Mission can do some valuable service activity there. To this end, funds are needed by the ashrama. One can send donations payable to 'Ramakrishna Mission' to the following address: 'Ramakrishna Mission, PO Khandepar, Parsol (Usgao), Inside from Khursakade Bus Stop, After Choughule Maruti Service Center, Ponda, Goa 403406'. The phone number is 94140 42638 and the email id is goa@rkmm.org. We hope that this would become one of the most influential centres of the Ramakrishna Mission and would spread Swamiji's message.

PB

The Ashrama Premises



References

1. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 319-20.
2. Swami Atmashraddhananda, *Goa—Blessed by His Sacred Touch: An Account of Swami Vivekananda's Visit to Goa in 1892* (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2014), 38.

इंरामः॥ ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यद्विज्जगत्प्राजगत् ॥ तेजानपक्वेन भुंजीष्यामग्धः कस्य खिरुनं ॥ कु
र्वन्ते वेदकर्मोशिभिर्जीविषेकृतं समाः शवं त्वयि नान्यथेतोस्ति न कर्म लिप्यते नरे ॥ अस्य ध्याः नाम ते लो
का अन्धेन तमसा ष्टाः ॥ तां स्ते प्रेत्याभिगच्छन्ति ये के चात्मह नो जनाः ॥ ३ ॥ अने जदेकं मनसो ज्ञवी
येनित देवा आध्रुवन् सर्वं मशत तद्वावतौ न्या नयेति तिष्ठन्स्मन्त योमातरि प्रवादधाति ॥ तदेजति त
न्नेजति तद्दुरेत दैतिके च तदं तरस्य सर्वस्य त दु सर्वस्यास्य बा ह्यतः ॥ ५ ॥ यस्तु सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मन्येवा
न पश्यति सर्वभूतेषु चात्मानं ततो न विजुगुप्सते ॥ ६ ॥ यस्मिन् सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मैवा भूदि जानतः
तत्र कोहः कः शोका का कर्चमनु पश्यतः ॥ ७ ॥ स पर्यगा कु र्त्तु मकायम ब्रह्मामस्त्रा विर ॥ ८ ॥ इन्द्रपाप
विहं क विर्मनीषी परिभूः स्वयं भू यथा तय्यतो ध्यान व्यदधा च्छा खतीभ्यः समाभ्यः ॥ ९ ॥ अन्धेन
मः प्रविशान्ति ये विद्यामसते ततो भयद्वते ततो यदुविद्याया ॥ १० ॥ प्रत्यदेवाहुर्विद्यया न्यसा
इरविद्यया इति श्रुश्रम धीशया येन स्तदि च च क्षिरे ॥ १० ॥ विद्यां चा विद्यां चा विद्यां च यस्तदं सो
भयं सह अविद्यया मृत्युं तीर्त्वा विद्यया मृतमश्नुते ॥ ११ ॥ अन्धेन तमः प्रविशान्ति ये संभ्रुतिमुषा

Sanskrit Script of the Isha Upanishad

Meditation on the Upanishads

Swami Shraddhananda

Invocation

Subtler than the subtle and vaster than the vast
is Atman,
the unborn and undying consciousness
hidden in our heart.
Let us realize the majesty of this, our true
nature,
by controlling our desires
and making our mind and senses tranquil.
Then alone shall we be free from
the sufferings of relative existence.

Introduction

WE SHALL STUDY the Upanishads, not from the beginning to the end, but covering some of the important themes. Taking each Upanishad one by one, we will find that each one has its own specific theme. We shall read certain passages and try to study them deeply. The Upanishads are statements of the deep facts of spiritual experience. In these passages, the deepest experiences cannot be communicated by words, but the sages of the Upanishads have tried to take our minds slowly

to the actual experiences. The object of our study is not academic discussion, but to understand deeply so that our study is practical and helpful in our spiritual experience. We have to go to the depth of these truths.

Class 1: Brahman is Eternal Truth and Knowledge

We will study some passages of the *Taittiriya Upanishad* from our book, *The Upanishads: Breath of the Eternal*, translated by Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester, (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1975), starting at page 82:

He who knows Brahman attains the supreme goal. Brahman is the abiding reality, He is pure knowledge and He is infinity. He who knows that Brahman dwells within the lotus of the heart becomes one with Brahman and enjoys all blessings.

According to the Upanishad, all people are trying to find their true Self. We are the totality of everything, but because we do not know it, we run after desires, any kind of desires. We are running after desires because we do not know

our eternal reality, our perfection. All the time we are really seeking our Self. The goal is to know that we already *are* everything. In this verse it says, ‘He who knows Brahman.’ Here, *Brahman* is used in the sense of the greatest. To know the greatest is the supreme goal of life.

Even in our dreams we are seeking this goal. Ramanuja, a great sage of Hindu philosophy, said that the dream state is God’s way of helping us to pursue some of our unbearable desires—for example, a desire to kill a person. Psychology indicates the same thing. If we watch our minds, we shall see that we are always seeking and seeking, just as the leaves of a tree shake with the slightest breeze: ‘I have to go here. I have to write this. I have to eat this.’ We are incomplete as long as we do not know our true Self.

If we want to understand the deeper truths of life, we have to understand that when we reach that infinite goal we will be satisfied. We will know that everything is inside us. How can we reach outside and grab it? It would be like trying to grab our own shadow. In this vast supermarket of life, everything on the shelves has been projected from our Self. The projections are one with us. They are already ours, so why should we try to grab them?

The literal meaning of the word *Brahman* is the greatest, the all-inclusive. We have the ability to reach Brahman. When we are eating or sleeping, we are on the same level as a dog or a cat. But on the level of our understanding and reasoning, we are able to reach this highest goal of life. The supreme goal is higher than any other goal. All lesser goals, such as a goal for a bachelor’s degree, being the best secretary or the best cook, are included in that supreme goal. As long as we are connected with a body and a mind, we have to pursue these lesser goals, but ultimately there is no running away from the supreme goal.

So what is Brahman? Brahman is the abiding

reality. *Satyam* is the Sanskrit for truth. Now what is real? Our ears are real, and the earth we are standing on is real. Everything we see and feel is real, but these things are a changing reality. Everything seems so real, *real*, real to us. If something strange comes, we are embarrassed: ‘What is this? What is this?’

Usually we are at peace with this changing reality. All the time real things pour into our experience. This is the experience of our reality. But then the Upanishad adds one adjective and that changes everything. That word is *abiding*—the *abiding* reality. If the experience of our normal reality is change, the Upanishad says there is a reality that does not change.

All that we experience brings us two things: one is knowledge and the other is joy. The quality and the intensity may differ, but we experience pieces of knowledge. Knowledge pours into us all the time. We use the word *conscious*. ‘I am *conscious* of the room. I am *conscious* of the table. I am *conscious* of this and that.’ Reality pours into us as knowledge, as something that exists. This existence comes to us as pieces of knowledge that we accept. As soon as we accept something there is a flicker of joy or gladness, otherwise we would have to run away from everything. Sometimes a mentally ill person says, ‘I can’t stand this. I can’t stand it!’ But for normal people, we accept this reality all the time.

Acceptance implies joy. If we watch our mind closely, we are aware of how much joy we have. There is joy always. When we walk on the road we have accepted the road, so there is joy. As soon as we accept a thing there is bound to be a subtle feeling of joy. In the things we dislike the joy is subdued. Any experience of reality is coming as a piece of knowledge. Side by side with this knowledge there is bound to be bliss or joy.

If we have accepted an experience, even looking at a rattlesnake, if we are at a safe distance,

brings us a feeling of joy. This procession of reality comes at us from all sides. Since we experience it in a piecemeal way, it seems like it is always changing.

The Upanishad tells us that our experience of brokenness is ignorance. Really speaking, reality cannot be broken. Knowledge cannot be broken. Bliss cannot be broken. We have to discover this great fact. All the time we experience reality, but because the experience seems broken, we do not reach the experience of unity. In a moment this insight can come, but it quickly goes. It has to be stabilized. If we develop our understanding we will see that at the back of change there is unchanging reality, unchanging knowledge and unchanging joy. That is Brahman.

Brahman is truth, a reality that does not change, that does not end. Brahman is an unchanging reality that is *satyam jnanam anantam*—eternal truth and knowledge. To find Brahman does not seem to be impossible because it is here all the time. We experience Brahman all the time, because Brahman is reality.

Unfortunately for us, Brahman seems to be changing. In outer space, where all the cosmic play occurs, planets and stars collide and dissolve—but is space disturbed? No, it is the silent witness. Something like that happens on the level of spiritual truth. Brahman is infinite reality. We have to understand that all these piecemeal experiences *are* that infinite reality.

As we proceed with our experiments in contemplation on Brahman, we have glimpses, and then we become brave. We say, ‘I am experiencing God when I touch this table because there cannot be anything other than Brahman.’

We are always experiencing reality. The experience of Brahman is so common. If we want the experience of Brahman to remain with us, we must see that it is with us all the time, just like the hair on our head. We have to say that there is no manifold. There is one unbroken reality and that is Brahman. This is how we challenge our own ignorance.

We have become slaves of our ignorance. Our mind says, ‘This is all manifold.’ We must tell our mind that the manifold is ignorance. We have to practice this in deep contemplation. Even when we work, part of our mind must be on that knowledge. We must practice so this idea goes deep inside us.

We need to continually lift our mind by embracing this reality in a full way. Just as we love our children and can hold them to our breast and feel so happy, so we have to embrace this manifold and know it is Brahman—it is infinite. Do not be perplexed with questions like,

‘Where shall I place my mind during meditation?’ No! Wherever the mind goes, that is Brahman. We need not be afraid. We need courage, but most of all, we need to have real love for Atman, for our true Self.

We have pursued many loves, but none of them have removed our doubts. Now let us love our true Self. It is not like, ‘Oh, I am going to unity. What will happen to my child, to my piano, to my husband?’ No! Nothing will be lost; all will be there. Know that the highest goal is with us all the time. *Satyam jnanam anantam*—that eternal truth, that reality—is unchanging.

What we have to do in our contemplation is remove the notion of the manifold. It is neither



an impossible nor a difficult task for the mind because the mind is always experiencing reality. The mind has to be told that everything that it is experiencing is unbroken reality, which has no change. If we can do this, we can reach the goal. The goal is to find Brahman because Brahman includes everything. Brahman is not something strange; it is the most well-known experience of our life. It is knowledge and existence. Know that Brahman is *satyam anantam*, reality that has no end. *Satyam jnanam anantam* Brahman—Brahman is eternal truth and knowledge.

Class 2: Question: ‘Who am I?’

The emphasis of the Upanishads is on the direct knowledge of truth. ‘What is reality?’ is our topic in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. This question begins in childhood when the child asks, ‘What is this? What is that?’ It is a basic urge in the human mind to want to know what this is all around us. Our sense of reality is because we feel our existence. We open our eyes and a kind of experience comes. Then we touch something and smell something: ‘What is this? What is that?’ We ask even when we are grown. The scientist asks, ‘What is this?’ The physicist asks the same question. In each field there is someone asking questions and seeking answers. If you are an artist, you ask from the standpoint of beauty, from the aesthetic. If you are a poet, you ask, ‘Oh, is it a poem written in the vast waters? In the sky?’

The Upanishads give the spiritual answer: reality—at the highest level of *satyam jnanam anantam* Brahman—is consciousness; it is knowledge. We are familiar with the experience of consciousness and of knowledge. There is a constant procession of knowledge passing through our mind. However, this procession of knowledge is not *anantam*, eternal knowledge—it is a broken knowledge. The Upanishad declares there is infinite knowledge that has the

characteristic of the knowledge we usually experience. But knowledge as we usually experience it is in pieces.

This broken knowledge is binding us and we want to get away from it. Just as ice cream is nice when it is fresh, but after three days of sitting out it is not good—we want to get rid of it. In this way, broken knowledge becomes a burden and does not bring us supreme peace.

The Upanishads say there is such a thing as infinite knowledge, where that light does not come and go. That infinite light of consciousness is reality. ‘What is this? What is that?’ The ultimate answer is everything is *anantam jnanam*—eternal knowledge—and that is Brahman. We are seeing only the outward forms when we are seeing the manifold.

Everything we see on the normal level is true on that level. But if we remain satisfied with that, we cannot reach the highest. That everyday level will leave many questions unanswered. When we take leave of this life, we will wonder if our whole life has been as a slave to some power. We will wonder, ‘Why did I come? Where am I going?’ We have to come to a level of spiritual inquiry, not because we think we will burn in hellfire if we don’t, but because we want to *know* reality. The Upanishad says that a time will come when we will have to ask the question: ‘Who am I?’

We are living with that answer all the time. We really are the infinite. Our true nature is infinite, but due to ignorance we remain satisfied with this little nature. The Upanishad says, ‘Okay, go on being happy like that, but the time will come when you will have to ask: “Who am I?”’ We have the potential to find that ultimate reality. That reality is infinite knowledge. When we say infinite knowledge, at once it becomes something very precious. We may work hard and spend four years in order to understand and research one little flower or a tiny rat that lives



IMAGE: WWW.OVERCOMELIFEOBSTACLES.COM

in the desert. We have seen on television shows how scientists are spending three years in the desert chasing one tiny, little insect.

Our study here is for infinite knowledge, infinite consciousness. Where is that precious knowledge to be found? If we are prepared to dedicate the time and energy for this search, we will find *satyam jnanam anantam* Brahman in our heart. If we ask this question, 'Who am I?', we have to dig into our heart. We have to use familiar words, and when the previously quoted verse says 'the heart', it means our inner space. There is an inner spiritual space within the heart, and it is there that we make our first exploration. The phrase, '*lotus of the heart*', is just a poetic way of saying it, although the word *lotus* is not in the Sanskrit of this Upanishad. When we try to explore that inner space, it must come closer and closer. Finally, we will completely identify with it.

There is no escape for us because that reality will just swallow our individuality. We will know that our true nature *is* that reality. At the back of the ocean, the mountain, the vast space, at the back of time, that reality is what we will know about our true Self. When we know *anantam jnanam*, the infinite light of knowledge, then our individuality will merge with that infinite reality. All of our questions will stop then because we will see that on the ultimate level, everything has merged. When we come back from that experience, we will not be fooled by broken knowledge. In the background of our mind that knowledge will be there. The goal is to strengthen that knowledge regularly by contemplation and make it our own. Functioning with that knowledge in the back of our mind, this everyday level of consciousness will no longer bind us.

The spiritual seeker must over and over

again try to concentrate on this. As soon as we close our eyes in meditation, we will feel: “Oh, ‘I’ consciousness is here. I am breathing. I am conscious of a thought. Consciousness has pervaded my mind.” While we are working, we are not always able to keep our mind on the infinite. We must keep up our regular practice of contemplation; then we will have a firm grasp of that consciousness.

Even though we are conscious all the time, we do not think about what consciousness is. In contemplation, think about that inner space and that light of consciousness. Just as there is one sun illuminating our whole world, in this way think about the consciousness that pervades our body and mind. Consciousness is inside our body and inside our mind. We must have an initial understanding of what is consciousness.

We need to have faith in the words of the *rishis*, the teachers of the Upanishads, just as we do when we are taking a laboratory class in a science college. The *rishis* declared consciousness *is*. This consciousness we have every day is really infinite. It is unbroken. It is truth. We have to try to imagine this more and more. We have to remember this. Do not be afraid. Be bold. This consciousness we feel inside the body is infinite consciousness. Consciousness is inside our body and it can project outside our body. This is what the teachers tell us.

Slowly by stages, we have to expand our understanding, and we have to know that this consciousness that is functioning in us is really everywhere. If we see the break, that is because of our ignorance. Meditate on the words of these great teachers. The doubts will melt away and we will feel the light of consciousness is really projecting everything. All this knowledge of the sun and the moon and the table and the chair is coming from that consciousness. As we carry on this inquiry, at first that small light will come within

our heart and it will grow and grow. We will discover that infinite light within and will know that we are that light.

Our text says, ‘*he who knows Brahman*’—definitely and without any doubt—that person enjoys all objects of desire. We have these childish *samskaras*, mental tendencies and ask such a small question: ‘What is the good of finding Brahman?’ It is a childish question, so a childish answer is given: ‘He enjoys everything.’ Are we enjoying our food? Are we enjoying sitting in our car? Always we evaluate our actions in terms of enjoyment. The answer is that all desires are with Brahman; Brahman enjoys everything. God is enjoying this creation, all the flowers and the people, everything. If we know that our true Self is that infinite light of consciousness, we know that all phenomena happen in us. We become cosmic. We no longer feel that we are just a little, individual being. It is the infinite that is holding everything.

When we come back from that *samadhi*, experience of knowledge, and as our *samadhi* becomes stronger, we will see this world as the poet William Blake wrote:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.¹

In the background of the mind, this experience will be there. That is *jivanmukti*, liberation. In our text, this paragraph gives the idea that whoever knows in their heart that infinite reality, they see joy and peace everywhere. The highest goal of life is to have that knowledge of the vast infinite within our heart. Such is the glory of the Self. The most important point to remember is that we *can* find it in our own heart. Not in one day; but if we go on probing day after day, bravely and with courage, identifying ourselves with that truth, we will reach the goal.

Swami Vivekananda told a story of the tigress that gave birth to a cub and then she died. That cub was born in a field with a herd of sheep. The tiger cub grew up thinking that it was one of the sheep and ate grass like all the others. One day, a guru tiger saw the 'sheep' tiger with the herd and sought to illumine the 'sheep' tiger. He thrust some meat in the 'sheep' tiger's mouth. Then the tiger cub roared and knew it was a tiger! This story appeals to us because, really speaking, we are tigers. All our pride of individuality is vain, very vain. We are foolish to want to remain little when we can discover our Self as that infinite light.

Class 3: Brahman is Present Always, Everywhere

When we identify ourselves with that light of consciousness in our heart, then everything is connected to us as consciousness. When our mind is able to experience that through inquiry, contemplation and going inward, then everything disappears and what remains is the indescribable Brahman. The mind cannot stay there all the time. For some people, the memory of that experience is so strong that they feel that the manifold *is* consciousness. They are not really bound anymore, not affected by this changing world. We have to practice that samadhi as often as possible and go to where our personality has merged into infinite consciousness. When our knowledge is not very stable and comes down and sees this manifold, then our mind immediately goes to its regular nature and begins to ask, 'Why? Where? What is it?' The Upanishad will give us a clue to help us train our mind as a spiritual seeker. When we see this manifold, we must relate it to *satyam jnanam anantam* Brahman. Never forget this fundamental truth. Everything has to be related to that truth.

From where did this manifold come? There is

no end to the mystery of this universe. The Upanishad brings an idea of creation. It is presented as a means to Self-knowledge. The Upanishad tries to affirm the fundamental proposition that everything is infinite consciousness. Remembering this, we can read the account of creation and we won't be confounded. If we forget that proposition, we will be lost in confusion. The goal of Self-knowledge is to somehow reach unity. When we have known unity, then the universe cannot confound us. It is all the play of consciousness. Really, that unity cannot be manifold; all forms are *not* really separate. However, the mind won't accept unity, because the mind loves this body and all the other separate forms of the manifold.

For Self-knowledge, one has to know that individuality is a shadow. Every moment everything is telling us that it is foolish to cling to this individuality. Why is it so precious? Each cat and dog has its own world. Each individual is in his or her own world. Everyone wants to write a book about their life, entitled *My Story*, recounting all the incidents of their childhood. Remember that each of us is just one grain of sand on the vast seashore of life. This is true! Think of humanity in the past, present and future—millions and millions of people. One individual is not very important. Why must we pay so much attention to our individuality? On the other hand, if we seek our true identity, our life will be blessed. We will find infinite consciousness. Everything that *is*, is in us. So the wise person looks deeper and tries to find his or her spiritual identity, that *satyam jnanam anantam* Brahman.

Now comes the story of creation. Do not take these creation stories seriously, but *satyam jnanam anantam* Brahman is important and does not change. Brahman is the unbroken light of consciousness. If we see actions and thoughts, it is nothing but the play of that

infinite Brahman. Here is this story of creation, but this too is Brahman. The Upanishadic ideal of evolution is given:

Out of Brahman, who is the Self, came ether; out of ether, air; out of air, fire; out of fire, water; out of water, earth; out of earth, vegetation; out of vegetation, food; out of food, the body of man. The body of man, composed of the essence of food, is the physical sheath of the Self.²

The phrase ‘out of Brahman, who is the Self, came ether’ means there was only the light of consciousness and then it appeared as space. When that experience of consciousness comes, within that experience is space. Really speaking, when we know the truth, there is no such thing as past or future. When that experience comes, the past and the future *are* the present. When we see *that* space, we know that it is our Self that is projecting space.

At the highest level, when there is no space or time, God is *nirguna*, the formless aspect of Brahman without attributes. Akasha is Sanskrit for space-time in our modern terminology. If there is space there has to be time. Thus, the spiritual seeker says space-time, but we should have the ability to push back space and time into that consciousness. With concentration we merge that space-time back into Brahman. In the *Chandogya Upanishad* it is presented differently. It says, ‘At first there was only *sat*, truth.’³ In that instance, existence and consciousness are the same thing. When the question of creation comes, the formless *nirguna* Brahman becomes *saguna* Brahman with attributes, the Creator. When you think of Brahman as creating or projecting something, then he is God. The *Chandogya Upanishad* says, ‘Space is Brahman’ (4.10.4). In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* it says, ‘Brahman, *after creating this universe, entered into this universe through and through*’.⁴ Each of these

Upanishads wants us to keep in mind the fundamental truth that everything is Brahman.

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* indicates that Brahman projected space-time. But the Vedanta student should not forget that Brahman is present always, everywhere. No point of space or time can exist without Brahman. Just as the illusion of a snake exists for a moment in the rope, so we are experiencing space-time constantly. A seeker of the Self should never lose track of this fundamental truth. Just as a faithful wife never forgets that she is Mrs. Schubert, in the same way, a seeker of Self-knowledge should never forget the fundamental proposition *satyam jnanam anantam* Brahman—everything is that fundamental consciousness.

The verse continues, ‘*out of ether, air*’ Then air came. It is gaseous. Brahman felt cold and wanted another coat, so he projected energy. That is fire. Fire, *agni*, or energy, is all the same thing. ‘*Out of fire, water*’—now comes the liquid state of nature. The mind will not rest until it has found a cause, so it is the job of philosophy in every age to provide answers that will satisfy the mind. When we are seeking spiritual knowledge, it is not materially caused, so this analogy of creation will be different from a scientific theory.

The seekers of spiritual knowledge accept these simple statements of creation because they understand that this manifold is just appearances. In this creation story the fundamental proposition has to stand, and everything else has to be adjusted to fit it. In the fields of science such as chemistry and physics, the story of creation is different. We have no fight with science because what they find is true on that level. Just as there is a difference between the waking state and the dream state, or if we go to Japan or Africa, everything is different. In the same way, we can function on the different levels of psychology or physics or in dream. We can function on many levels.

Slowly, this simple creation becomes more and more complex—first, ether, then air, then fire, then water, then earth. Out of earth comes vegetation from inorganic to organic. The object of this evolution is to satisfy the mind that this creation has come from God. We have to remember at every stage that *satyam jnanam anantam* Brahman. It is Brahman who appears as all the different stages of this evolution. In order to go to the deeper meaning, we must have little glimpses of our spiritual nature as consciousness. When that glimpse comes, then the true explanation of this cosmology becomes clearer. We forget the past tense.

As the seeker, we have to realize that creation appears in us. We are always projecting space. Instead of thinking that creation has appeared in the past, try to feel that it is constantly appearing. We have to feel that all creation is within us and not just as this little individuality.

In the highest Vedantic understanding, meditation is ignorance. So how can that knowledge come? One has to wait until the mind has become free from body-consciousness. Then we will know the timeless spirit as the light of consciousness. We will feel this vast space is in us. We are projecting it. There is no question of the past—we are projecting it right now. This body is showing its teeth; this body does this or that. It is not the little individual.

As Shankaracharya, the great sage of the *Vivekachudamani*, *The Crest Jewel of Discrimination*, describes, ‘Just as one sees the shadow, he does not identify with the shadow.’⁵ A student of Self-knowledge should always try to know that this body is like a dream body or like a shadow. These are the Vedantic disciplines. The knowledge will come that ‘I am pure consciousness. Changes come to my body, but not to me, the timeless, infinite Self. I look to the ageless past and I am there. Again, I look into the future and

I am there.’ When that kind of merging comes, then evolution has a different meaning.

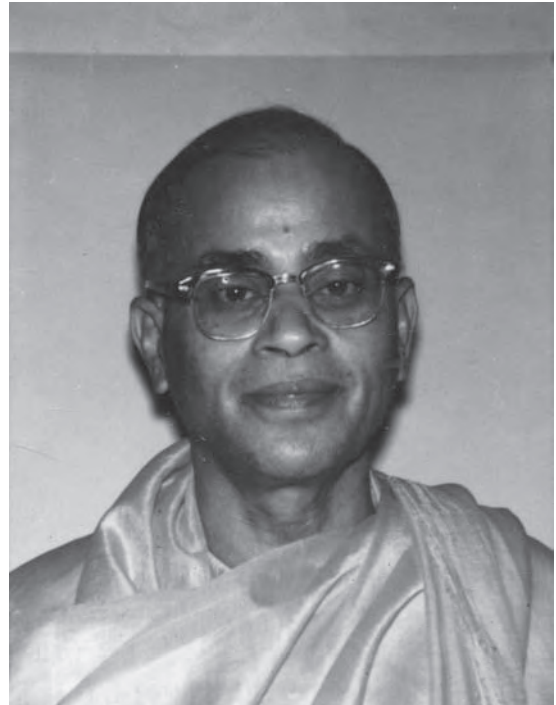
As the infinite reality, everything is merging in us—the ether, the air, the fire. We are not afraid of Darwin or his theories. The scientists say that it has taken millions and millions of years for humanity to get here. That is all right, but the Vedantist says that time is a play; it is an illusion. We have had a glimpse of the ultimate reality as *satyam jnanam anantam* Brahman. The Vedantist never forgets that everything is really Brahman.

(To be continued)

References

1. William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*.
2. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 2.1.1.
3. *Chandogya Upanishad*, 6.2.1.
4. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1.4.7.
5. Acharya Shankara, *Vivekachudamani*, 163.

Swami Shraddhananda (1907–96)



The Meaning of Sri Ramakrishna's Statements about Swami Vivekananda in the Light of Scriptures

Swami Vishwarupananda

AN ATTEMPT to describe Swami Vivekananda, the prophet of this age, is like throwing light on the sun using a lamp. Nevertheless, a humble devotee feels content waving lights at the sun-god by uttering the mantra '*dipo'yam pratigrihyatam*; please accept this lamp'.¹

Of late there have been varied views regarding what Sri Ramakrishna says about who Swamiji was. 1. Some opine that Swamiji was an incarnation of Rishi Nara while some others hold that he was the incarnation of Rishi Narayana. 2. According to some he was one of the *saptarishis* of the *saptarishimandala*, the abode of the seven sages. Some others express their doubts about this. The rishis of the *saptarishimandala* are Gautama, Bharadvaja, Vishvamitra, Jamadagni, Vasishtha, Kashyapa, and Atri.² There are also available some different lists of names of these seven sages. However, nowhere do we find the name of Rishi Nara or Narayana in the various lists of the names of seven sages. Hence, the meaning of Sri Ramakrishna's statement about this is not clear, rather it appears contradictory. 3. Some say: 'Swamiji is one among the seven sages immersed in samadhi in the indivisible realm of condensed luminosity'.³ This, in a way, is what Sri Ramakrishna himself says. Elsewhere he says: 'Narendra was one among the four in the indivisible realm and also one of the seven rishis' (783). These statements too seem contradictory.

4. Some others say that Sri Ramakrishna has declared: 'Narendra is *dhyana-siddha*, perfect in meditation' (795).

However, according to the *Vishnu Purana*, the *saptarishimandala* is in the *svavah-loka*, the third upper world, the celestial sphere.⁴ According to the *Yogavarttika* of Vijnanabhikshu on Vyasa's commentary on the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali, *saptarishimandala* is in the *bhuvah-loka*, the second upper world, the skies or the aerial sphere.⁵ But neither *svavah-loka* nor the *bhuvah-loka* is the abode of the seven sages. The abode of sages like Sananda, who were perfect in meditation, is *tapoloka*, the realm of austerities, where yogis are immersed in meditation.⁶ According to this verse quoted in Vyasa's commentary on the *Yoga Sutra*, '*Brahmastribhumiko lokah*; the world of Brahma has three spheres', *tapoloka* is within *brahmaloka*, the uppermost realm, the abode of Brahma, the lord of the universe.⁷

We do not come across any statement of Sri Ramakrishna that Swamiji descended on earth from the *brahmaloka*, and therefore here too we see a contradiction. How then do we reconcile all these contradictory views? What do Sri Ramakrishna's statements about Swamiji truly mean? I find it important to analyse these statements but before we undertake that exercise, it is necessary to discuss some relevant issues here. We shall do that first.

The Authority to Teach Spirituality

In the scriptures, we find the description of two kinds of world teachers: the *prakritilina* purusha, one merged in the cause of the universe, of Samkhya and the *adhikarika* purusha, one with special authority, of Vedanta. According to Samkhya, the state of a *prakritilina* purusha is '*prakritako bandha*, bound by Prakriti'.⁸ They do not have the knowledge of Self or Purusha. However, they can possess a divine power because of their identification with Prakriti (45). The followers of Patanjali hold: '*Prakritilinasya uttara bandhakoti*; there is later bondage for one absorbed in Prakriti'.⁹ Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Narendra is *nitya-siddha*, eternally perfect'.¹⁰ 'Narendra belongs to a very high plane—the realm of the Absolute'.¹¹ Hence, it is clear that Swamiji is not a *prakritilina*.

Elsewhere, Sri Ramakrishna says: 'Naren will teach people' (985). Therefore, we have to accept that the world teacher Swamiji was an *adhikarika* purusha according to Vedanta. It is well established in Vedanta that knowers of *saguna* Brahman, Brahman with attributes and knowers of *nirguna* Brahman, Brahman without attributes, attain *adhikarika*, authority to teach, by God's grace. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna, these persons 'have a badge of authority' (142). Among these, the knowers of *saguna* Brahman, who obtain *krama mukti*, liberation in stages; have as aspirants, practised different meditations like the *daharavidya* that bring the fruit of power and splendour. And as a result of those meditations, they attain the state of *adhikarika*, which culminates in complete liberation. This is the standpoint of Vedanta.¹²

The knowers of *nirguna* Brahman can also attain *adhikarika* by God's grace. These scriptural statements the knowers of *nirguna* Brahman immediately become of the nature of Brahman on attaining such knowledge: '*Brahmavid brahmaiva bhavati*; the knower of Brahman becomes Brahman itself'¹³ and '*Etad pashyan rishi*

Vamadevah pratipede aham manuh abhavam suryashcha; the sage Vamadeva, while realising this Self as that Brahman, knew "I was Manu and the sun".¹⁴ Like us ordinary people, the knowers of Brahman cannot maintain an independent identity different from Brahman. Nonetheless, even such great people attain *adhikarika* when appointed by God. Till such appointment comes to an end, they take repeated births out of their own volition and exhaust their authority, and finally merge into the supreme state. In the *Yavad-adhikara-adhikarana*, section on 'Same Meditation in the Same Branch' of the *Brahma Sutra*, these issues have been discussed in detail. There is description of *adhikarika* people like Sanatkumara and Krishna Dvaipayana.¹⁵

Where Do Adhikarika Purushas Stay?

The *adhikarika purushas* do not always stay amongst us. Only sometimes do they descend on this earth according to God's will. Between births, they dwell in *brahmaloka*, the sphere of Brahman. How do we know? Knowers of *saguna* Brahman, who have attained *krama mukti* reach *brahmaloka* and stay there till the complete age of Brahma and when their *adhikarika* is over, they merge in the supreme Brahman. At that time, those who have attained *krama mukti* also merge in the supreme Brahman along with the others. This is known from this Puranic statement: '*Brahmana saha te sarve samprapte pratisanchare, parasyan te kritatmanah pravishati param padam*; at the time of final annihilation all self-realised souls enter with Brahma into the supreme abode'.¹⁶ The word *pratisanchare* here means final annihilation. The word *kritatmanah* means those who have got self-realisation. The other meanings are clear. These things have been discussed in the *Brahma Sutra* and Shankara's commentary on it.¹⁷ On this subject there is other scriptural statement too: '*Asyaiva kinchidupari adhashchandakapalatah,*

vaikuntabhuvanam rajan mukta yatra vasanti hi; slightly above this and beneath the hemispheroidal lid of the cosmic egg is the world of Vaikuntha, O king. It is there that the liberated ones dwell.¹⁸

By all these scriptural statements and by the standpoint of Vedanta, we know that the knowers of *saguna* Brahman, who have attained *krama mukti*, dwell in the aforesaid plane in *brahmaloka*. Consequently, it gets established that the knowers of *nirguna* Brahman, who are *adhikarika purushas*, also dwell in *brahmaloka* in the same manner, till their *adhikarika* is not completed. This is so because it has been said: 'Of him who is without desires, who is free from desires, the objects of whose desire have been attained, and to whom all objects of desire are but the Self—the organs do not depart. Being but Brahman, he is merged in Brahman.'¹⁹ On the basis of scriptural statements such as this, we have to accept the independent status of the knowers of *nirguna* Brahman, who are merged in Brahman here itself, though it is not possible that they will go to higher spheres and attain *brahmaloka*, then the abovementioned passage from the *Skanda Purana* and the presumption that one cannot come to this world without leaving the other worlds, we have to reject the knowers of *nirguna* Brahman dwelling in *brahmaloka*. The inner vision of yogis born out of their practice is also proof for the aforementioned. In the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali we find descriptions of many immersed in meditation in *brahmaloka*.²⁰ However, by the logic that more spiritual practice would bring more fruits, one has to conclude that compared to the knowers of *saguna* Brahman, who have attained *krama mukti*, the knowers of *nirguna* Brahman, who become *adhikarika purushas* dwell in the higher planes of *brahmaloka* that has several planes.

Rishis Nara and Narayana

Sri Ramakrishna told to Narendra or Swamiji:

'You are Nara, the ancient sage, the incarnation of Narayana.'²¹ In this context, it is imperative that we know more about these two rishis. In the womb of Brahma's son Dharma's wife and Daksha's daughter Murti, were born the twin rishis, incarnations of Vishnu, Nara and Narayana.²² They attained perfection by practising austerities at Naimisharanya and Badarikashrama.

We find many references in the Puranas to the effect that these two rishis had attained *adhi-karatva*, the authority to teach. Among these references this verse from the Bhagavata: '*Dharmasya daksha-dubitary ajanishta murtyam, narayano nara rishi-pravarah prashantah; naishkarmya-lakshanam uvacha chachara karma, yodyapi casta rishi-varya-nishevitanghrih*; [that eternal *purusha* incarnated as] Nara-Narayana rishi, who is perfectly peaceful and is the best of sages, was born as the son of Dharma and his wife Murti, the daughter of Daksha. Nara-Narayana rishi taught [devotees like Sage Narada] the devotional service of the Lord,²³ by which material work ceases, and he himself perfectly practised this knowledge. He is living even today, his lotus feet served by the greatest of saintly persons.'²⁴ Note the words 'living even today'. Without being an *adhikarika purusha*, it would have been impossible for a knower of *nirguna* Brahman to 'practise this knowledge' and live 'even today'. When they are living taking an independent identity, then we have to necessarily conclude by the previously mentioned logic that they are dwelling in *brahmaloka*.

Sri Ramakrishna's Statements about Swamiji and their Meaning

Now we shall try to understand the meaning of Sri Ramakrishna's statements about Swamiji. In this context, a wonderful vision of Sri Ramakrishna is thus described by him:

One day I found that my mind was soaring high in samadhi along a luminous path. It soon

transcended the stellar universe and entered the subtle realm of ideas. As it ascended higher and higher, I found the path lined with ideal forms of gods and goddesses on both sides. My mind then reached the outer limits of that region, where a luminous barrier separates the sphere of relative existence from that of the Absolute. My mind crossed that barrier to enter the transcendental realm, where no corporeal being was visible. Even the gods dare not enter that sublime realm and are content to keep their seats far below. But the next moment I saw seven venerable rishis seated there in samadhi. It occurred to me that these rishis must have surpassed not only humans but even the gods in knowledge and holiness, in renunciation and love. Lost in admiration, I was reflecting on their greatness when I saw a portion of that undifferentiated luminous region condense into the form of a divine child. The child²⁵ came to one of the rishis, tenderly clasped his neck with his lovely arms and, addressing him in a sweet voice, tried to drag his mind down from the state of samadhi. That magic touch roused the rishi from the superconscious state, and he fixed his half-opened eyes upon the wonderful child. His beaming countenance showed that the child was the treasure of his heart. In great joy the divine child spoke to him: 'I am going down. You must go with me.' The rishi remained mute but his tender look expressed his assent. As he gazed at the child, he again became immersed in samadhi. I was surprised to see a fragment of his body and mind then descending to earth in the form of a bright light. No sooner had I seen Narendra than I recognized him to be that rishi.²⁶

Sri Ramakrishna's Mind Travels to Brahmaloka

In the abovementioned vision of Sri Ramakrishna that 'transcended the stellar universe', we understand that his mind went to *bhuvah-loka* according to *Vijnanabhikshu*, the author of *Yogavarttika* on the *Vyasabhashya* on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*; and Sri Ramakrishna's mind transcended the great *saptarishimandala* falling in the sphere

of *suvah-loka* according to the *Vishnu Purana*. Therefore, we have to reject the view of those who hold that Swamiji was a rishi of the *saptarishimandala* just by hearing Sri Ramakrishna's words that Swamiji was 'one of the seven rishis'.

We understand that Sri Ramakrishna's mind transcended the 'path lined with ideal forms of gods and goddesses on both sides' and went further higher from the divine sphere. About the divine path that leads to *brahmaloka*, the Upanishads say: 'He goes to *vayuloka*. He goes to *varunaloka*. He goes to *indraloka*. He goes to *prajapatiloka*. He goes to *brahmaloka*.'²⁷ 'The deity identified with the world of the gods, from him the sun, and from the sun the deity of lightning.'²⁸ In other words, the spiritual aspirant wishing to attain *brahmaloka* has to transcend all the divine spheres like *vayuloka*, *varunaloka*, *prajapatiloka*, and *vidyutaloka*; and finally attain *brahmaloka*. Therefore, the above quoted Sri Ramakrishna's statement shows that his mind transcended all the divine spheres and reached *brahmaloka*.

Meaning of the 'Relative' and 'Absolute' Spheres

In this context, further proof is this: Sri Ramakrishna said: 'A luminous barrier separates the sphere of relative existence from that of the Absolute.' It means that, that which has attributes and can be differentiated, is the relative. Those who are qualified to perform rituals and worship have the differentiating knowledge of 'I' and 'You'. The experiential sphere that such people attain as a result of the rituals and worship they perform, that is 'sphere of relative existence'. From this earth to heavenly realms, everything is in this 'sphere of relative existence', because this has the differentiating knowledge and is the result of worship. That which has no attributes, and is without differentiation, that is the 'Absolute'. Brahman is the only indivisible entity that is free from all attributes of

space, time, and causation. Those who have realised that indivisible formless entity, Brahman, to be one's self, they are also 'Absolute'. The *brahmaloka* attained by those Absolutes, that is, those knowers of formless, attributeless Brahman, is the meaning of the words 'the sphere of the Absolute'. We have to consider these knowers of Brahman to be of two kinds: Those who have known this indivisible formless Brahman to be endowed with qualities like being without sin;²⁹ they are knowers of *saguna* Brahman. Those who know as their self the unconditioned, attributeless, Brahman; they are the knowers of *nirguna* Brahman and *adhikarika purushas*. Both these kinds of people have to be indicated by the words 'knowers of Brahman'. We have established earlier that both these kinds of knowers of Brahman attain *brahmaloka* and dwell there.

Sri Ramakrishna's Mind Travels to the Highest Plane of *brahmaloka*

Sri Ramakrishna says that his 'mind crossed that barrier to enter the transcendental realm'. The word 'crossed' is notable. His mind transcended 'the sphere of relative existence' or the group of gods and goddesses; and did not at once reach the abode of the *adhikarika purushas*, who are knowers of the unconditioned Brahman. Instead, he crossed in between the abode of the knowers of *saguna* Brahman, who attain *krama mukti*. This is the meaning that can be derived from Sri Ramakrishna's statement, else the use of the word 'crossed' would become meaningless.

The Existence of 'Luminous Barrier'

Sri Ramakrishna talks of a 'luminous barrier' between the sphere of the gods and *brahmaloka*. We find mention of such a barrier in the scriptures also: 'Some superhuman person leads those who are there to Brahma.'³⁰ What is the cause for such action? Those gods, who have crossed

the lower spheres, carry those wanting to reach *brahmaloka*. However, they cannot go beyond the sphere of lightning. By this account it would not be out of place if we infer a 'luminous barrier' between the sphere of the gods and *brahmaloka*. The presence of such a 'luminous barrier' can also be known from the following statement of the Puranas: '*Tadagratah pashya bhupa chandrakoti-samastvisha, yashchayam tejorashir-janihi brahmasammanah*'; look ahead, O king, there is a mass of refulgence with the lustre of a crore of the moons. It generates delight all round like a crore of the oceans of nectar. Know that this mass of refulgence belongs to the abode of Brahma.'³¹

Till now by analysing Sri Ramakrishna's statements, we have understood that his mind crossed the sphere of gods and the luminous barrier, and also crossed the *brahmaloka*, which is the abode of the knowers of *saguna* Brahman, who have attained *krama mukti*, and finally entered the abode of the knowers of *nirguna* Brahman, who are *adhikarika purushas*.

Form in the Indivisible Sphere

Sri Ramakrishna says: 'the transcendental realm, where no corporeal being was visible.' This is quite logical, because it is impossible that those great personages, who knowers of the unconditioned Brahman and are established in the highest plane of *brahmaloka*, would have any gross attribute that is easily visible. However, because of attaining *adhikaratva*, and consequently because it is not possible to get merged in Brahman, out of God's will their presence with the least attribute has become possible. And donning a gross attribute is the will of such personages and has been described in the *Brahma Sutra*.³² Hence, though Sri Ramakrishna did not see any 'corporeal being' in the beginning, he did see such beings after some time: 'But the next moment I saw seven venerable rishis seated there in samadhi.' There is no contradiction

here. There is no lack of clarity in the rest of this description by Sri Ramakrishna. Therefore, from this statement that arose from the supra-sensory knowledge of Sri Ramakrishna, we can conclude that Swamiji is an *adhikarika purusha* immersed in meditation in the highest plane of *brahmaloka*. Sri Ramakrishna assumed the form of a 'divine child' and brought him down to the earth from there.

The Meaning of the Statement: 'One Among the Four in the Indivisible Realm and also One of the Seven Rishis'

Now we will try to find the meaning of the statements of Sri Ramakrishna that Swamiji was one of the 'seven venerable rishis seated there in samadhi' in 'the transcendental realm' and that Swamiji was 'one among the four in the indivisible realm and also one of the seven rishis'.³³ In these statements, the speciality of four among the seven rishis immersed in meditation in 'the transcendental realm', that is, in the abode of the knowers of *nirguna* Brahman and *adhikarika purushas* has been indicated. It has been proved in the *Apratikalambana-adhikarana*, section on worship with and without symbols, of the *Brahma Sutra* that those who worship Brahman with the help of symbols cannot attain *brahmaloka*.³⁴ However, it has been proved in the *Ikshatikarma-adhikarana*, section on the object of seeing, of the *Brahma Sutra*, that those who attain perfection by meditating on the attributeless Brahman using the symbol *Om* attain *brahmaloka* and *krama mukti*.³⁵ But those, who attain perfection by meditating on the attributeless Brahman without depending on any symbol, do not have liberation in stages, but attain the state of Brahman in this world itself. We know this by scriptural passages such as this: 'The organs do not depart.'³⁶ However, those who attain *adhikarika* by God's grace, have to stay in *brahmaloka* till the great *prarabdha* karma resulting from such *adhikarika* is not exhausted. This

we have established earlier. Therefore, we understand that Sri Ramakrishna is talking about these two kinds of knowers of *nirguna* Brahman in the 'transcendental realm'. Of the seven sages, four³⁷ meditate on the attributeless Brahman without any symbols and the other three are knowers of *nirguna* Brahman, who meditated on Brahman with the help of *Om* and have attained *krama mukti*. Even though they are knowers of *nirguna* Brahman, by the logic that the quality of result will depend on the quality of practice, there is such a difference among the seven sages who dwell in the 'transcendental realm' and hence, there is no contradiction in Sri Ramakrishna's statement.

Swamiji, Incarnation of Rishi Narayana

Sri Ramakrishna says: 'You are Nara, the ancient sage, the incarnation of Narayana.'³⁸ There can be two meanings of this statement: 1. 'I know that you are that Rishi Nara, who was an incarnation of Lord Narayana or Vishnu in the yore.' 2. 'I know that you are the human incarnation of that ancient Rishi Narayana.' Definitely, the meaning cannot be both. Elsewhere, Sri Ramakrishna says that Swamiji was Narayana, who had assumed a body for his sake. He used to call Swamiji as 'Narendra-Narayana'. There is no difficulty in understanding the meaning of these statements. Hence, we have to use the maxim '*Sandigdhe tu vakyasheshat*; in case of doubt in ascertaining meaning, the meaning has to be ascertained from the end of the sentence. By this maxim, we can ascertain the meaning of the earlier doubtful statement of Sri Ramakrishna by understanding his later clear statement. Hence, it is established that Swamiji is an incarnation of Rishi Narayana.

Thus, we have seen that the teacher of this age, Swami Vivekananda is the *adhikarika purusha* Rishi Narayana, who dwells in *brahmaloka*, and has incarnated for teaching the world because of

God's order. This is the meaning we derive from Sri Ramakrishna's statements.



Notes and References

1. This article was originally published as Swami Vishvarupananda, 'Shastradrishite Swamiji-Sambandhe Sri Ramakrishna-Vanir Tatparya', *Udbodhan*, (BS Pausa, 1370), Vivekananda-Shatavarshiki Sankhya, 73–80. It has been translated from the original Bengali to English by P Usha, a volunteer at the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, Varanasi. This article was culled and the translation was arranged by Swami Kamalananda, Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Varanasi.
2. See *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 2.2.4.
3. See Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, trans. Swami Chetananda (St Louis: Vedanta Society of St Louis, 2003), 774.
4. See *Vishnu Purana*, 2.7.9, 18.
5. See Vijnanabhikshu, *Yogavarttika on Vyasabhashya on Patanjali's Yoga Sutra*, 3.26.
6. See *Yogavarttika*, 3.26 and *Vishnu Purana*, 2.7.13.
7. *Vyasabhashya on Patanjali's Yoga Sutra*, 3.26.
8. Vachaspati Mishra, *Samkhya-Tattva-Kaumudi*, 44.
9. *Vyasabhashya*, 1.24.
10. *Divine Play*, 795.
11. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 810.
12. See Acharya Shankara, *Commentary on the Brahma Sutra*, 3.3.32: 'Jnanantareshu cha aishvaryadi-phaleshu-asaktah syur-maharshayah te pashchad-aishvarya-kshaya-darshanena nirvinah paramatmajnane parinishthaya kaivalyam prapur-ityupapadyate; it may well be that some great sages succumb to the lure of other kinds of meditation resulting in the acquisition of mystic powers; but later they become detached by noticing how these powers decay; and then following steadfastly the knowledge of the supreme Self, they attain liberation.'
13. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 3.2.9.
14. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1.4.10.
15. See *Commentary on the Brahma Sutra*, 3.3.19.
16. *Kurma Purana*, 12.269.
17. See *Brahma Sutra*, 4.3.5 and *Commentary on the Brahma Sutra*, 4.4.22.
18. *Skanda Purana*, Purushottama Khanda in Vishnu Khanda, 22.34.
19. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 4.4.6.
20. See *Vyasabhashya*, 3.26: 'Tritiye brahmanah satyaloke chatvaro devanikayah—achyutah shud-dhanivasah satyabhah samjnasamjninashcheti; in *satyaloka*, the third world of Brahma, live four classes of gods. They are Achyuta, Shud-dhanivasa, Satyabha, and Samjnasamjnings.'
21. *Divine Play*, 757.
22. See *Bhagavata*, 2.7.6 and *Devi Bhagavata*, 4.5.11.
23. See Acharya Shankara, *Commentary on the Bhagavadgita*, 3.4: 'Nishkarmabhavam karmashunyatam jnanayogena nishtham nishkriyatma-svarupena eva avasthanam iti yavat; freedom from action, the state of being free from action, steadfastness in the Yoga of Knowledge, the state of abiding in one's own Self which is free from action.'
24. *Bhagavata*, 11.4.6.
25. The author of *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, Swami Saradananda, mentions in this place that the child here is Sri Ramakrishna, as later told by himself to Saradananda.
26. *Divine Play*, 774.
27. *Kaushitaki Upanishad*, 1.1.
28. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 6.2.15.
29. See *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 8.1.5.
30. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 4.15.5.
31. *Skanda Purana*, Purushottama Khanda in Vishnu Khanda, 22.27.
32. See *Brahma Sutra*, 4.4.8: 'Samkalpadeva tu tat-shruteh; as a result of the will alone, because the Upanishad says so.' Also see *Brahma Sutra*, 4.4.7: 'Evamapi upanyasat purvabhavat avirodham badarayanah; Badarayana says that even so, there is no contradiction, since the earlier nature exists according to Upanishadic reference.'
33. *Divine Play*, 783.
34. See *Brahma Sutra*, 4.3.15.
35. See *Brahma Sutra*, 1.3.13. See also Acharya Shankara, *Commentary on the Brahma Sutra*, 1.3.13: 'Trimatrenomkarena-alambanena paramatmanam abhidhyayatah phalam brahmalokaprapthih kramena cha samyagdarshanotpattih iti kramamuktyabhiprayam etad bhavishyati; the result vouchsafed for one meditating on Brahman with the help of Om, as constituted by three letters,

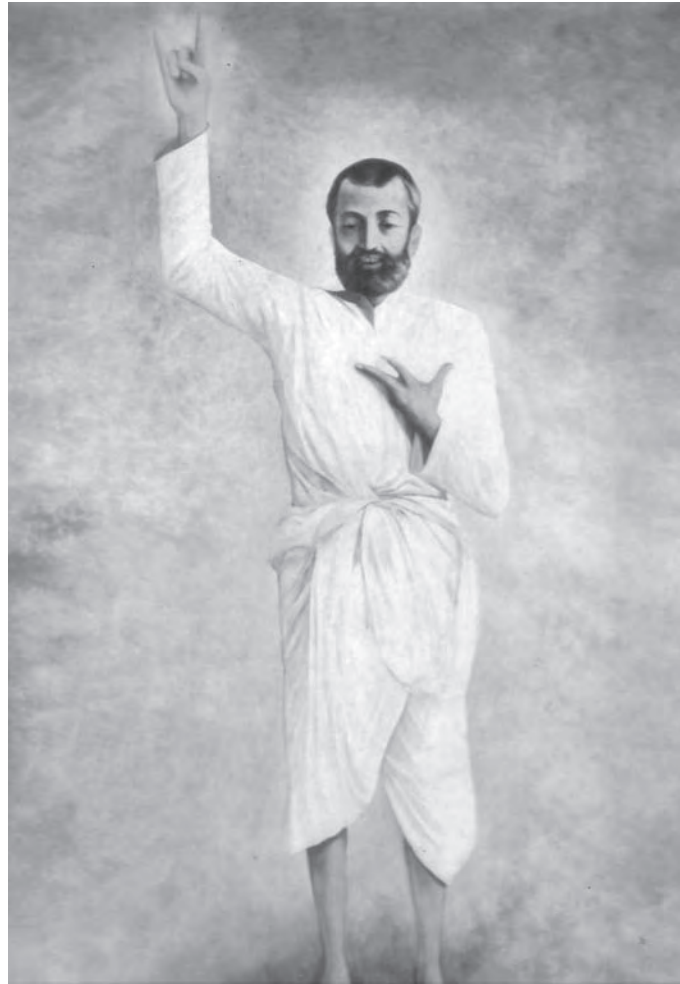
(Continued on Page 427)

The First of January, 1886 and its Anniversary

Swami Satyapriyananda

IN THE HISTORY OF the Ramakrishna Order, the first of January is reckoned as a very significant day. That is the anniversary day of the first of January 1886 which witnessed an outpouring of grace from Sri Ramakrishna to the devotees who had assembled at the Cossipore Garden House. Here, at Cossipore, Sri Ramakrishna lay with an emaciated body unable to turn sides even, being in the grip of cancer. And yet how many extraordinary things he did even in this state of health. One day he came down the steep stairs with lightning speed to drive away a cobra on the date palm tree towards which his disciples were going to gather date juice, the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi being the sole witness of this unbelievable incident. Time and again he revealed in Cossipore his overflowing love for his devotees. Sashi, who later became Swami Ramakrishnananda, for whose bodily protection from the extreme cold of the winter Sri Ramakrishna himself tried hard to pick a shawl from the clotheshorse. On another day Sri Ramakrishna crawled on all fours to fetch a glass of water for Girish Chandra Ghosh who had come in summer and seeing that the water was not cool enough, gave it reluctantly.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say sometimes at Dakshineswar that he was willing to be born a hundred thousand times to do good to living beings. During his entire life he showered his



blessings on the devotees. The devotees were charmed to recall to memory and discuss his infinite unconditional grace.

On one occasion, Sri Ramakrishna had gone from Dakshineswar to a theatre managed by Girishchandra Ghosh to witness a certain religious drama. The actress who took the leading part had the good fortune to worship the feet of Sri Ramakrishna while he was in an ecstatic mood at the end of the play. Since then, she looked upon Sri Ramakrishna as God himself. She was eagerly seeking for an opportunity to meet him again. When she heard of his serious illness, she now became very eager to see Sri Ramakrishna once more. Being acquainted with Kalipada Ghosh, a devotee, she entreated him to help her in this matter. Kalipada did not believe that Sri Ramakrishna's illness would increase if

the actress, considered by society to be an evil-doer, became repentant and touched his holy feet; nothing could injure him. One day dressing her like a European gentleman, he came with her at dusk to the Shyampukur house, introduced her to those present as a 'friend' of his, took her to Sri Ramakrishna, and told him who she really was. Learning that the actress had come in that dress throwing dust in the eyes of others, Sri Ramakrishna—fond as he was of merriment—had a hearty laugh. Pleased with her faith and devotion, he praised her courage, strategy, and reverence, and gave her a little spiritual instruction that she might have faith in and reliance on God, and bade goodbye to her soon afterwards. She shed tears of joy and repentance, touched adoringly his holy feet with her head and went away with Kalipada. This is one of innumerable incidents of the bestowal of grace by Ramakrishna.

Ignorant devotees sometimes fall into the error of clinging to both the lives, the worldly and the spiritual, and of regarding the increase of sentimentalism as the acme of religious experience. They do not realise the very firm basis, the great austerities and ascetic practices that Sri Ramakrishna had undergone during his sadhana, on which the extraordinary emotional upsurge of Sri Ramakrishna was established.

Hence, the development of sentimentalism in the devotees without proper basis received its most powerful impetus from the time Girishchandra gave his spiritual 'power of attorney' to Sri Ramakrishna, and being fully convinced that Sri Ramakrishna was the incarnation of the age, he began preaching it to one and all with great joy and enthusiasm. Although many had had that idea regarding Sri Ramakrishna, all of them remembered his warning that when large numbers of people came to regard him as an incarnation and began to flock to him, that would mark the time of his demise and disappearance from their midst.

However, Girishchandra had his own way of thinking. He could never in his life conceal any thought or action of his, good or bad. He, therefore, could not obey that interdict of Sri Ramakrishna. He invited one and all quite indiscriminately to do what he himself had done. People therefore neglected the necessity of personal effort, devotional exercises, renunciation, and austerity, and uttered: 'We have given him the power of attorney', 'We have surrendered ourselves to him', and so on, and came to regard the realisation of God as a matter of easy attainment.

Girishchandra's infinite love for Sri Ramakrishna could have prevented his preaching it that way, had he not been misled by his extreme intelligence which made him believe that Sri Ramakrishna had assumed a body to arrest the decline of religion and to give a new spiritual awakening to humanity, and that he was voluntarily undergoing the miseries of birth, old age and sickness, so that suffering embodied beings could take refuge in him and be freed from the 'threefold miseries'. His intelligence dictated to him that, the facts being so, Sri Ramakrishna, the object of his immense love, would never pass away without completing his mission.

Ramachandra, another devotee, was born in a Vaishnava family. It was therefore no wonder that he should truly look upon Sri Ramakrishna as Sri Krishna and Sri Gauranga. He had observed a certain amount of restraint in proclaiming his theories before Girishchandra began preaching his ideas about Sri Ramakrishna. The attitude of Girishchandra towards Sri Ramakrishna served like adding fuel to the fire of his zeal. He did not stop with merely preaching that Sri Ramakrishna was an incarnation of God, but indulged in speculations to establish the identities of particular devotees of Sri Ramakrishna with particular devotees of his in his previous incarnations as Sri Gauranga and Sri

Krishna. Those who experienced bodily changes and sometimes lost normal consciousness on account of temporary surges of sentimentalism occupied a high spiritual rank in his judgement.

Swami Saradananda, a monastic disciple and biographer of Sri Ramakrishna poignantly mentions this phenomenon:

While the devotees allowed themselves to be carried off by the current of sentimentalism, thanks to their firm conviction that the Master was the incarnation of the age, Vijaykrishna Goswami came from Dacca to see the Master and declared before all without any reserve how, at the time of meditation in his room at Dacca, the Master had appeared there physically before him and how Vijay touched his body and limbs. This acted like a high wind fanning a wild fire. Five or six of the devotees then used to undergo bodily changes and to lose partial consciousness as soon as they listened to devotional music etc. They gave up the royal road of common sense and reason and discrimination between the real and the unreal and were getting themselves habituated to the morbid attitude that anything might be brought at any time by virtue of the divine power of the Master and were living on the tiptoe of such expectations.¹

While the devotees allowed them to be carried off by the current of sentimentalism, Vijaykrishna Goswami came from Dacca to see Sri Ramakrishna and declared before all without any reserve how, at the time of meditation in his room at far away Dacca, Sri Ramakrishna had appeared there physically before him and how Vijay even touched his body and limbs. This acted like a high wind fanning a wild fire. Five or six of the devotees then used to undergo bodily changes and to lose partial consciousness as soon as they listened to devotional music. They gave up the royal road of spiritual practice supported by reason and discrimination, and began

to habituate themselves to the morbid attitude of waiting for miracles to happen. They were of the belief that anything might be brought about at any time by virtue of the divine power of Sri Ramakrishna and they were standing on the tiptoe of such expectations. A true devotee, as Sri Ramakrishna pointed out in another instance, should not be a fool.

When this unhealthy sentimentalism was being regarded by the devotees in general as the acme of religious life, it was the keen intelligence of Narendranath Datta, later Swami Vivekananda, the foremost of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees, that foresaw the baneful effects of such developments. He knew well that there was no substitute for the real spiritual excellences like renunciation, self-control, single-minded devotion, and the rest. Narendra tried to explain this to those carried away by sentimentalism and tried to save the situation.

Sentimentalism produces no *permanent* change in life. Thinking that the circle of young devotees, possessed of firm bodies and determined minds, could easily understand his words, Narendra said:

The sentimentalism that does not produce a permanent change in human life but makes man eager to realize God at one moment, but at the very next has little power to make him desist from lust and greed, has no depth, and is, therefore of, little value in life. Though under its influence some might shed tears and experience horripilation and other bodily changes, or even a temporary withdrawal of normal consciousness, it is produced by nervous weakness. A man should surely eat nutritious food and take the help of a physician, if he cannot suppress it through the exercise of his will-power (1240).

He continued:

There is much of artificiality in those bodily changes and absence of normal consciousness.

As our control over ourselves grows firmer, our real genuine sentiments go deeper. It is only in the lives of very rare persons that spiritual sentiments become so powerful as to assume the form of tidal waves, overflowing even the firm dam of control, and manifest themselves as bodily changes and temporary cessation of normal consciousness. Foolish people cannot understand this and reverse the process. The depth of spiritual sentiments, they think, is attained as the result of those bodily changes and the loss of normal consciousness. They, therefore, make conscious efforts to induce those effects in themselves. That will and effort of theirs develop gradually into a habit and weaken their nerves increasingly as days pass on, so that in course of time those changes come on them at the slightest appearance of a sentiment. Consequently, they become insane or afflicted with a chronic malady by indulging freely in them. In trying to practise religion, eighty percent of people turn cheats and about fifteen per cent mad; the remaining five only attain the immediate knowledge of the infinite Truth and are blessed. Hence beware (ibid.).

Devotees filled to the brim with such sentimental ideas, overlooking the caution given by Narendranath, like to look upon this occasion as a Kalpataru celebration implying that Sri Ramakrishna will fulfil all their desires. Recall the story of a person who sat under a wish-fulfilling-tree and found that all his wants were getting fulfilled by the mere wish. Observing this a fear suddenly arose within him as to what he would do if a tiger were to appear suddenly from nowhere and pounce upon him. As soon as this thought arose in his mind, a tiger appeared, pounced upon him and devoured him. Such is the problem with Kalpataru, if all wishes are fulfilled by the mere thinking of them without any effort to equip one to acquire those things. Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda are not like that. We may pray for

anything but we get only those things for which we are adequately equipped and which are beneficial to us in the long run.

The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi time and again set this truth brightly by saying that 'desirelessness is everything'. Sri Ramakrishna also said that 'a prayer to have desire for devotion at the lotus feet of God is no desire'. That is the only thing that matters. Swami Saradanandaji has clearly stated that this day is the day of 'self-revelation and the bestowal of freedom from fear' (1266).

We find that Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda have in their life gradually grown in stature by this aspect known as 'self-revelation'. Sri Ramakrishna often posed this question to the devotees as to how they looked upon him, how much knowledge he had, and so on. As he prophesied, when the truth of his real nature was fully exposed, he gave up his body in *samadhi*.

Sri Sarada Devi stayed on earth after the *mahasamadhi* of Sri Ramakrishna 'to demonstrate the Motherhood of God', and gave up her body after completing the glorious task of spiritual ministration for which she had been commissioned by Sri Ramakrishna himself, and getting the luminous stature of being the Mother of the Ramakrishna Order.

Swamiji gave up his body after finishing his task of carrying out Sri Ramakrishna's mission in India and abroad which had been entrusted to him by Sri Ramakrishna himself, and after the completion of this tremendous task he came to know from where he had descended on earth, and went back to that *saptarishi mandala*.

In the vesper service we sing those significant lines, *martyamritam tava padam maranormi nasham*. Death is called the *mahat bhayam*, the great fear. The lotus feet of Sri Ramakrishna is the elixir that will save the devotees from this great fear.

We may also note here that Sri Ramakrishna is the great and infallible weapon to kill the great demon of 'doubt', *samsaya rakshasa*, which doubt characterises the present age of scepticism and materialism. These aspects of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and Swamiji must be kept in mind always.

Sri Ramakrishna freely distributed the blessing of awakening of Consciousness but not so other blessings! In fact he sighed saying that people shed jugful of tears for wife and children, but who weeps for God?

By showering the blessings of awakening of Consciousness, Sri Ramakrishna was indirectly hinting that devotees must pray for this awakening of Consciousness and not run after material things.

He did teach erring mortals how to pray. Addressing the Divine Mother, he said:


O Mother, I throw myself on Thy mercy; I take shelter at Thy Hallowed Feet. I do not want bodily comforts; I do not crave name and fame; I do not seek the eight occult powers. Be gracious and grant that I may have pure love for Thee, a love unsmitten by desire, untainted by any selfish ends—a love craved by the devotee for the sake of love alone. And grant me the favour, O mother, that I may not be deluded by Thy world-bewitching maya, that I may never be attached to the world, to 'woman and gold', conjured up by Thy inscrutable maya! O Mother, there is no one but thee whom I may call my own. Mother, I do not know how to worship; I am without austerity; I have neither devotion nor knowledge. Be gracious, Mother, and out of Thy infinite mercy grant me love for Thy Lotus Feet.²

Every word of this prayer, uttered from the depths of his soul, stirred the minds of the listeners. The melody of his voice and the childlike simplicity of his face touched their hearts very deeply. That is the real prayer of a real devotee of God.

Unable to bear the blessings of awakening of

Consciousness, some even returned the blessings! Some who were aware that all that Sri Ramakrishna had was theirs did not rush to him but were preparing his bed and rendering other such acts of service!

Therefore let us never reduce God to the level of a servant boy or maid to run errands; rather let us love him with all our heart, mind, and soul, and surrender to him seeking only his unconditional grace.

If the unique body-mind complex is prepared, let us pray for the awakening of Consciousness, which is the achievable goal of human life. If this equipment is not prepared yet, let us work hard with that end in view. If we are aware that just as a child inherits its parents' wealth, we will also inherit God's wealth, then let us live in that awareness. What is the wealth we will inherit? Jnana, bhakti, *viveka*, *vairagya*, *shanti*, *sukha*, *prema*, and *samadhi*. 

References

1. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2010), 1238–9.
2. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 731.

(Continued from Page 422)

is the attainment of the world of Brahman, and the emergence subsequently of complete realisation by stages. In this way this is meant for leading to emancipation by stages, so that there is nothing faulty.

36. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 4.4.6.
37. Since Swamiji was one among the four and since according to the statement in Gita, 6.44, 'By that previous practice alone, he is borne on in spite of himself', we do not find any account of Swamiji meditating on Brahman with the help of *Om*, we conclude that these four rishis were meditating on Brahman without depending on any symbol.
38. *Divine Play*, 757.

BALABODHA

Ancient Wisdom Made Easy

Deva

DEVA IS A COMMONLY used Sanskrit word. It is used by people, who do not even know Sanskrit, as it is present in almost every Indian language. The word 'deva' means god but it is necessary to see all the meanings of this word. This is a Sanskrit word. Sanskrit is a classical language like Greek, Latin, and Persian. And in Sanskrit, as in most classical languages, most words are derived from a stem or root.

The word 'deva' has been derived from the root word *div*, which means to cause to lament, to pain, vex, ask, beg, go, suffer pain, cast, throw, play, gamble, wager, bet, sport, joke, trifle with, have free scope, spread, increase, shine, be bright, praise, rejoice, be drunk or mad, sleep, wish for, or cause to play. The word 'deva' means one who does any of the things specified by the root *div*. Generally the word 'deva' is used in the sense of 'god'. However, etymologically, the word could mean anyone who causes to lament, causes pain, vexes, asks, begs, goes, suffers pain, casts, throws, plays, gambles, wagers, bets, sports, jokes, trifles with, has free scope, spreads, increases, shines, is bright, praises, rejoices, drinks, is mad, sleeps, wishes for, or causes to play. So, a beggar, gambler, sportsperson, joker or comedian, drunkard, and a lunatic can be called deva in Sanskrit! Anyone who praises, rejoices, or sleeps can also be called deva.

The general meaning of the word 'deva' is god, which can be arrived at by taking the meaning of anyone who is bright or shines. Gods are considered to be greater in virtues compared to asuras or demons. Devas are also called *suras* and

demons are called 'a-suras' meaning the opposite of gods. Indian scriptures are replete with references to devas and their constant struggles with the asuras. Though in general, devas are portrayed as virtuous, they too have been shown to have anger, conceit, greed, and envy.

Every person has various positive qualities that could be called devas and many negative qualities that could be termed asuras. The goal of spiritual life is to increase the influence of the positive qualities, diminish the effect of negative qualities, and eventually transcend both. The stories of devas and asuras found in mythology are symbolic and they represent the constant tussle between good and evil that takes place constantly within an individual.

The word 'deva' is not restricted to Hinduism but is used in Buddhism and Jainism too. In Buddhism, devas are a category of higher beings or a path of the six paths of the cycle of repeated incarnations. Some devas have no physical form and some have physical forms. However, Buddhist devas are relatively less passionate. The demon Mara also belongs to a class of Buddhist devas, who live in luxury. All Buddhist devas are endowed with various powers. Not all Buddhist devas are helpful to spiritual aspirants just as the demon Mara is a big obstacle in attaining illumination.

In Jainism the word 'deva' denotes celestial beings, who have different heavenly abodes. However, the Tirthankaras of Jainism are also sometimes referred to by the word 'deva'. The heavenly beings in Jainism are born without any parents.

PB

TRADITIONAL TALES

The Miracle That Brought Faith

THERE LIVED a rich man a long time ago. He was also a good devotee of God. He had employed a pandit to expound the Bhagavata in his house.

That was the month of June. The full moon was given away its light to the entire world, just as good people help others without any expectation. There were elaborate arrangements in that house for seating the listeners of the Bhagavata recital. Many kinds of garlands made of different flowers like jasmine and rose adorned the house. Their fragrance spread all over the house and created a naturally divine atmosphere.

Apart from this, various fruits like mango, jackfruit, banana, grapes, and pomegranate had been peeled and cut and arranged in beautiful plates. All arrangements for the worship had been made. Then, the worship of Sri Krishna started. All the devotees started singing the names of Sri Krishna. All the directions echoed with the singing of the names. In the sublimity of night, the divine image of Sri Krishna adorned with fragrant garlands, charged the devotees with a great devotional fervour. All the devotees present, forgot themselves, and got immersed in an indescribable divine bliss.

The pandit, who was expounding the Bhagavata, was well-versed in the scriptures. He was not just a pandit, but also a great singer. Hence, he now and then sang beautifully verses on Sri Krishna. 'Sri Krishna is our Krishna, he is blue-complexioned!' 'Sri Krishna has born, let the wind broadcast this news in all the directions!' His songs had meanings such as these and he showered a torrential downpour of music as

though it were a divine singing. Hearing his songs, all the devotees forgot the worries of the world and were immersed in the divine experience. They were established in the divine meditation on God.

At that time, a robber entered the house where the Bhagavata was being expounded. The minds of all the devotees were concentrated on the Bhagavata recital. The robber was focussed on robbing the house. Since, all the devotees were concentrating on the Bhagavata recital, the robber thought it best to use the opportunity and rob the house. He searched for expensive and precious ornaments throughout the rich man's house. Oh! What to speak of the divine sports of Sri Krishna! Not one precious expensive ornament could the robber find. He was quite dejected. In that mood, he went to the place where the Bhagavata recital was going on, and sat there amongst the other devotees.

The pandit was enthusiastically expounding the Bhagavata in a loud voice as follows:

'It was early morning. What to speak of the wonderful scene at Gokula at that time! The leaves of trees rustled. The calls of numerous birds filled the place. It was as if the birds were saying: "The leader of our Gokula, Sri Krishna, is about to come and immerse us in a sea of bliss."

'At that time, cows and calves rushed eagerly to the mansion of Nanda, now and then raising their heads and mooing as though they were saying: "Has Sri Krishna come to take us all?"

'The playmates of Sri Krishna, Sridhama, Sudhama, and Vasudhama, all the children of cowherds were standing outside the bedroom of Sri Krishna and were trying to wake up Sri Krishna

and Balarama by their frantic calls: “The dawn has come because of our good deeds. All suffering and darkness have disappeared. Our dear Sri Krishna! Arise, awake! Why sleep still? Come outside and behold this scene! The cows and calves are making noise not seeing you. How long are we waiting for you! Start immediately. Let us go to the forest. We shall graze the cows and calves and return. Elder brother Balarama! Are you too asleep? Awake, awake immediately.” These calls reached the ears of Yashoda, Sri Krishna’s mother.

‘As soon as Yashoda heard the calls of Sri Krishna’s playmates, she woke up her sons saying: “Sri Krishna, Balarama! Enough of sleep! Both of you get up! I have churned fresh butter for you. I have kept aside sweet dishes for you. My wealth! My children! Get up! Take bath, have food, and take the cattle to the forest.”

‘Then Yashoda bathed her children. She fed

them with butter, cream, and many kinds of food items. She dressed them in silk attire. Then, she decorated Sri Krishna and Balarama with glittering diamond ornaments that cost millions and were impossible to look away from. She kissed her children and sent them to the forest for grazing cattle.’ The pandit thus continued his Bhagavata recital.

The robber was listening intently to what the pandit had told till then. But, nothing that the pandit said after that entered the robber’s ears. He thought to himself: ‘Wow! What a great opportunity have I got! If this is not luck, then what is? The Sri Krishna and Balarama that the pandit speaks of are small children. The ornaments that they wear are made of diamond and cost millions. And to top it all, they go to the forest all by themselves! All I have to do is to give them two slaps each on their cheeks and they will silently remove all the ornaments and keep them in front of me. I should not lose this wonderful opportunity. I would not do that.’

The robber then came out of the rich man’s house. He waited outside thinking: ‘Let the pandit finish his storytelling.’ All that the robber could think now and all that deeply impressed his mind were the two boys the pandit was talking about, the appearance of Sri Krishna and Balarama, and the glitter and sparkle of the ornaments that adorned their body.

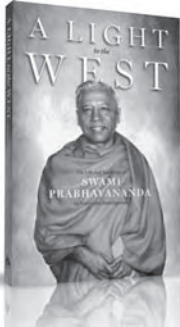
The robber could think only these thoughts: ‘If only I could rob those small boys of the expensive ornaments they are wearing! Aha! Then, nobody would be wealthier than me in this world. Sri Krishna, Balarama, diamonds!’ Along with the thought of the diamond ornaments, the divine thought of Sri Krishna and Balarama also gradually made place in the robber’s mind. He started to go into some state of divine absorption.

(To be continued)



REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



A Light to the West: The Life and Teachings of Swami Prabhavananda

Pravrajika Anandaprana
Ed. Pravrajika Brahmaprana

Vedanta Society of Southern California,
1946 Vedanta Place, Hollywood,
CA 90068-3996, USA. 2016. xvi + 175
pp. \$10.95. PB. ISBN 9780874813395.

This book portrays how Abani Ghosh became Swami Prabhavananda, a spiritual teacher and guide, who gave inspiration and solace to many those who came in contact with him in India and the US. Christopher Isherwood reminisced: 'I found him waiting for me there when I arrived. I was immediately aware of the atmosphere of calm ... It was like a sudden change in altitude to which I should have to get accustomed ... His smile is extraordinary. It is somehow so touching, so open, so brilliant with joy that it makes me want to cry' (blurb). Swami Prabhavananda inspired Swami Siddheswarananda, a disciple of Swami Brahmananda, with the ideal of renunciation and helped him in taking to the life of sannyasa for which he remained 'eternally grateful to him' (80).

Pravrajika Anandaprana, who has authored the book, has woven the tapestry depicting the humble and commanding personality of Swami Prabhavananda. While weaving this tapestry, she has used the threads of her notes of his public conversations and private gatherings, his private teachings and letters, in a manner that his personality and wisdom shine through the pages of this book.

Morning shows the day. Swami Prabhavananda was endowed with spiritual traits since his young age. He tells: 'Sri Chaitanya was my first love. When I was thirteen or fourteen years old, I had a private tutor ... He asked me to read this book [*the Chaitanya Charitamrita*]. I wept at every page' (7).

Swami Prabhavananda was fearless and had

unwavering one-pointed devotion to Swami Brahmananda, popularly known as Maharaj, who later became his guru. Once Maharaj asked him to go to Swami Premananda and give him a massage. The latter did not take personal service from anyone and Maharaj knew about it. But he used to play practical jokes on his brother disciples. Swami Prabhavananda went to his room and found him lying on a cot, covered with a sheet. He narrated:

I took one of his feet and began to massage.

Swami Premananda sat up and said, 'Go away!

I don't want a massage. Go to Maharaj!' But

I did not listen to his protests. Again I pulled

his leg toward me and began to massage,

explaining 'Maharaj asked me to do it'. This

continued for some time. Every time the

swami objected, I told him I had to carry out

Maharaj's order. Finally he relaxed, and I gave

him a good massage (28).

Anandaprana has brought to light few lesser known tender aspects of the bonding shared by both Maharaj and Swami Prabhavananda. On his arrival at Bhubaneshwar from pilgrimage to South India, Swami Prabhavananda found a letter waiting for him. The letter was written by Maharaj's Secretary and Maharaj added in Bengali in his own writing: 'I miss you very much' and signed 'Yours affectionately'. Swami Brahmananda was not only his guru but his all in all. He once said: 'Maharaj is with me most of the time. ... Maharaj gave me everything' (133). Maharaj never asked him to meditate. He told him only, 'Abani, love me' (61). In later years Swami Prabhavananda told his disciples in America, 'I don't know of any discipline except love. Love the guru, meditate!' (162).

Anandaprana takes us to a pilgrimage where Swami Prabhavananda was having the blessings of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. We find him also coming in contact with several disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and sitting at their feet and learning

many lessons of his life. Swami Turiyananda told him: 'Give light, and more light will come' (73). On another occasion he told him quoting Acharya Shankara: 'There are two kinds of argument: one is to discuss in order to arrive at the truth. This is called real argument. The other is to forcibly establish one's opinion. This is not called argument' (31). After the trustees of Ramakrishna Math decided to send Swami Prabhavananda to the US Swami Shivananda aka Mahapurush Maharaj wanted him to get used to being in the presence of women, an essential prerequisite for a teacher in the West. He sent the swami to teach at the Gadadhar Ashrama of Calcutta where many 'educated women from aristocratic families would come to the ashrama to study the Gita and Upanishads ... and to ask questions about the scriptures' (76). His dependence on God came from his lessons from Maharaj as well as from his interaction with other swamis of the Order. Regarding his going to the US he told Swami Saradananda that he was sending him to America and he did not know what he could teach and preach there. 'Swami Saradananda replied in English, and his words are still ringing in my ears, "That is none of your business! We shall see to that!" and they have seen to it' (75).

Anandaprana takes us from India to San Francisco where Swami Prabhavananda stayed for two years and later went to Portland. There he became famous as 'Militant Swami'. To pull the gradually thinning audiences he once announced the topic: 'On Becoming Rich through Psychology'. He then scolded the large audience saying: 'You have come to hear *me*, who have no bank account, lecture to you on how to get rich through psychology. Aren't you fools!' (91) Afterwards he spoke on Christ.

From Portland he came to Los Angeles to open a centre with the help of 'Sister'—Mrs Carrie Mead Wyckoff—who with her two sisters had the privilege of being the host of Swami Vivekananda for six weeks during the winter of 1899–1900. The author has given a detailed account of the struggle Swami Prabhavananda went through while building the Vedanta Society temple in Hollywood and how God helped him.

Anandaprana has included four letters written by Swami Prabhavananda to one of his brother disciples at Ramakrishna Math, Madras, besides

incorporating his teachings. The letters show his continuing interest in all the matters relating to the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in India and his ideas about the culture of the US and about his work there. In one of the letters he writes about his daily routine. An orthodox Hindu mind nurturing the stereotyped images may find it unpalatable while few others may marvel at his level of acceptance without losing sight of his goal. Does not Swami Vivekananda that it is good to be born in a Church but never good to die in it?

Saroj R S

Noida, Uttar Pradesh



Amazing Secrets of The Bhagavad Gita Ed Viswanathan

Rupa Publications India Pvt Ltd, 7/16
Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi
110 002. 2016. xi + 299 pp. ₹ 295. PB.
ISBN 9788129140371.

The Bhagavadgita, popularly known as the Gita, is the science that awakens human consciousness and helps us to discover our true nature. Lord Krishna says in the Gita: 'I am the terrible Time, the destroyer of people, and am here proceeding to destroy them' (11.32). Indeed, the Gita destroys our misconceptions about ourselves and about the world around us, it truly destroys our lower self so that we can reach our higher Self, it leads us from ignorance to knowledge Absolute. Mahatma Gandhi once said that whenever he had a doubt or a problem he turned to the Gita and had found the answer.

The Gita is presented as a dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna in the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The scene of the battlefield relates religion to the realisation of life. Many describe the Gita variously as 'The Song of God' or 'The Celestial Song'. But, Viswanathan, the author of the present book, prefers to call it 'the roar of the God' (3), since the setting is a battlefield. It is a roar indeed. Is the Lord not roaring when he tries to awaken Arjuna from his slumber saying, 'Whence, O Arjuna, has this weakness, not entertained by honourable men (Aryans), nor conducive to (the attainment of) heavens, and leading to ill fame come on you at this crisis?' (2.2)

The Gita, one of the most sacred scriptures, has been translated into almost all the languages of the country and some languages of the world. Many great thinkers have written commentaries on it and have interpreted this great book of meditation. Viswanathan knows about this and therefore says: 'This book [by the author] gives a summary of the ideas and concepts found within the Bhagavad Gita' (ix). 'The book is aimed at people between the age group eighteen and thirty who normally do not have time and patience' (x) to go through the entire Gita. This book is in the form of a dialogue between a grandfather and a grandson.

Of the 700 verses that constitute the body of the Gita, Viswanathan has picked up 316 verses for his book and organised them according to topics that makes the book readable and easy to comprehend. The topics are formulated in a manner that an inquisitive young mind burdened with many unsolved questions related to life will find a pointer to his problem while going through the 'Contents' page of the book. Besides chapters on devotion, unselfishness, salvation, mind, sense-organs, hell and heaven, creation and annihilation, and so on, the book has topics of general interest such as Hinduism, Hindu Scriptures, Mahabharata, Women status, Sati, the best time to pray and to die, Stress, and so on.

Viswanathan's approach throughout the book is logical and pragmatic. He says: 'In my opinion, telling the story through the voices of Lord Krishna and Arjuna was the great sage's means of providing an authoritative look at the ultimate truths he wanted the world to know' (45). According to him and many others also, 'The Mahabharata War was not a bloody war of relatives killing the relatives. Instead, it was a symbolic war between right and wrong, good and bad, which is happening within all of us everyday' (42). We are witnessing this conflict within us since eternity and all our spiritual endeavours are aimed at getting us out of this conflict and making us follow the path of Dharma.

Viswanathan has quoted from other religions of the world to substantiate his viewpoints and thus attempts to remove the narrow boundaries that divide humanity resulting in broadening the mental horizon of his young readers. 'The incarnations

of God are not limited to India. That happens worldwide. When Jewish society had problems, God incarnated as Jesus Christ' (102), he maintains.

In the chapter on 'What is Atman?' Viswanathan quotes Rishi Ashtavakra's instructions to the King Janaka, 'O Mighty king, there is no need to look high for the stars to get answers. They are already within you. Just reach deep within yourself and find out all the answers' (117). The same thought echoes when 'Luke 17:21 (King James Bible) states: "Behold, the kingdom of God is within you"' (ibid.) or the Greek philosopher Socrates says "'Gnothi seauton" meaning "Know thyself"' (ibid.).

Truth or God is not the monopoly of any person, race, or nation. 'In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna never judges or orders Arjuna. He only explains to him the pros and cons of every issue, leaving it up to Arjuna whether to follow Krishna's teachings or not' (39). Our ancient rishis have told us to search the truth all over the universe. Hinduism is based on the 'concept of utmost freedom of thoughts and actions' (11). Therefore, anyone 'who searches after truth is automatically a Hindu' (8) maintains Viswanathan.

R S Saroj



Quitting

Peg Streep and Alan Bernstein

Da Capo Press, 44 Farnsworth Street,
3rd Floor, Boston, MA 02210, USA.
2014. vii + 262 pp. \$14.29. PB. ISBN
9780738218106.

A well-paid job, settled family life, and a good house was what was defined as a formula for a happy life. Well, this was what we had thought of as the means to happiness. But times have changed and so has our approach to life. We now search for happiness in every field of activity in our lives whether it is at work, at home, or at leisure. However, we may not be satisfied with what we are doing at this moment. Yet, we are not in a position to move on.

The authors of this book have provided a tool in our hands in understanding ourselves, especially how our mind works. The book has provided us with a very practical way to move on in our lives

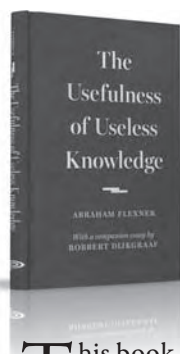
towards a more happy life. It has demystified the term quitting in a more positive and proactive way.

The book helps one to assess oneself while making one aware of the thought patterns, including feelings and emotions.

This book is helpful for not only people who are not happy and are stuck-up with their present position in lives, but also for others. Youngsters will find it as a useful tool for their future. Parents will be in a position to understand them better and hence be better parents. Those who are currently employed will be able to assess their aims or goals and realign themselves if necessary. The elderly may find the ideas presented in the book providing them with new ideas to spend their free or leisure time more gainfully.

The book is well researched with ample notes at the end. The bibliography presents an interesting list for further reading.

Arundhati Sinha
Noida



**The Usefulness of
Useless Knowledge**

Abraham Flexner
With A Companion Essay by
Robbert Dijkgraaf

Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540, USA. 2017. 93 pp. \$9.95. HB. ISBN 9780691174761.

This book contains two essays. The first essay titled 'The World of Tomorrow' by Robbert Dijkgraaf is a commentary on the second essay titled 'The Usefulness of Useless Knowledge' written by Abraham Flexner.

Abraham Flexner was an American citizen, Jewish by religion and an eminent educational reformist. He wrote this essay in 1939 and it was first published in the *Harper's Magazine*.

Flexner was against the standard model of educational practices prevalent in US schools and universities. He felt that educational institutions were turning out 'herds' of students, who were not being encouraged to follow their instinct of 'curiosity' to investigate their ideas. He denounced the ways of teaching in US Universities.

Flexner wrote this essay while he was at the Rockefeller Foundation. Broadly, the essay advocated what the future of US Universities should be like. In order to further this idea, he established a school where there were no grades given, where there was no standard curriculum and where there were no examinations. Students were allowed a free run of their imagination and were encouraged to investigate ideas they were curious about.

In his essay Flexner explores the dangerous outfall of sacrificing curiosity at the altar of pragmatism in human thought, education, and science. According to Flexner the most important discoveries were made by men and women whose research stemmed from curiosity rather than the desire to invent useful things. Flexner's essay is full of examples in support of the theory propounded by him. One such example is the invention of the radio by Marconi. The beginning of the radio was at the hands of James Clerk Maxwell, who merely to satisfy his curiosity developed calculations in the field of magnetism and electricity. Later, these calculations were used by Hertz to demonstrate electromagnetic waves which were carriers of wireless signals. Both Maxwell and Hertz were in pursuit of useless knowledge the invention of which was of no use until Marconi came along decades later and used this data to invent the radio. So the useless knowledge ultimately became useful. The progress of the world tomorrow depends not only on technical expertise but also on unobstructed curiosity. Curiosity based research according to Flexner attracts the best minds in the world. He was able to arrange the mass exodus of brilliant scientists that included Einstein from Europe to America.

In his essay Flexner promotes fearless thinking. He encourages people to ask themselves the questions 'Who am I?', 'Where am I?', and 'What does it mean to be a human being?'

Curiosity based research can be all pervasive—whether it is music, art, chemistry, physics, medicine, and industry. It leads to intellectual and spiritual development. Basic research inevitably would waste some money but the success would far outweigh the failures.

Arundhati Sinha

MANANA

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Extracts from a thought-provoking book every month.**

A Survival Guide To The Misinformation Age

David J Helfand

Columbia University Press, 61 West 62 Street, New York, NY 10023. 2016. xii + 325 pp. \$29.95. HB. ISBN 9780231168724.

THROUGHOUT HUMAN HISTORY, information has been limited, difficult to access, and expensive. Consider the decade-long apprenticeship required to become the shaman in a hunter-gatherer tribe. Or picture a medieval monk in his cell, copying by hand a manuscript from Aristotle for the monastery's library—a place where only the monks could browse. By 1973, when I published my first scientific paper, little had changed. *The Astrophysical Journal*, the leading scholarly publication in my field, included a total of 10,700 pages that year (a lot to thumb through looking for a specific piece of information) and cost \$651 for an annual subscription (in inflation-corrected dollars)—difficult to access, expensive, and largely limited to American astronomers.

In the last decade, this situation has been radically reversed: information is now virtually unlimited, ubiquitous, and free. Google the 'complete works of Aristotle,' for example; within one second you can find <http://classics.mit.edu/Browse/browse-Aristotle.html> and download—for free—every surviving word that Aristotle wrote. And in my field? Virtually every scientific paper on astronomy published in the world since the nineteenth century is instantly available at http://adsabs.harvard.edu/abstract_service.html, where you can search for any word and for every mention of every celestial object ever named; you can search by author, journal, title, which paper another paper

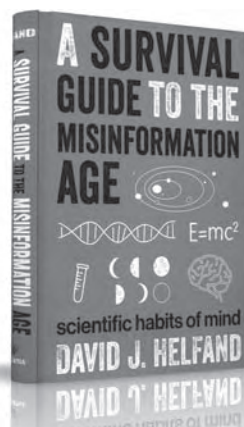
was cited in, etc. And you can do this anywhere on your smart phone—again, at no charge whatsoever. Unlimited, ubiquitous, and free.

This epochal transformation, however, is not an unbridled blessing. According to a study published a couple of years ago by IBM, with the proliferation of electronic communication devices and services—from tablets to smart phones and from social media sites to e-mail—we are now creating 2.5 quintillion bytes of new data every day (that's 2,500,000,000,000,000,000 bytes or the equivalent of five *trillion* books the length of this one, enough to fill bookshelves half a kilometer high stretching around the Earth at the equator). The IBM report goes on to note that roughly 90 percent of all the information that exists in the world today was created in the past two years. Not much time for editing, testing, and serious reflection.

As a result, accompanying Aristotle and the *Astrophysical Journal* on the Web is a tsunami of misinformation that threatens to overwhelm rational discourse. Much has been written about the democratizing power of the Web; less has been said about its virtually unlimited capacity for spreading misinformation—and disinformation—in the service of ends that are distinctly undemocratic and unhealthy both for individuals and for our planet.

Why is misinformation so prevalent?

Information is transferred when the thought of a single mind is shared with another. In



hunter-gatherer societies, information may have been very limited, but it was highly accurate and self-correcting—misinformation was minimized. A hunter who routinely led his kin away from the best hunting grounds was soon either ostracized or simply ignored. Anyone who gathered poisonous berries instead of nutritious ones was quickly eliminated from the gene pool.

In his recent book *The Social Conquest of Earth*, E O Wilson describes in evolutionary terms how this sharing of valid information was rewarded. My favourite theorem from this book states that whereas a selfish individual will always outcompete an altruistic individual, a group of altruists will always outcompete a group of selfish individuals. Wilson's view is that collaboration among humans has become an essential part of our wiring through natural selection. Throughout most of human prehistory, then, validating information and sharing it was both valued and rewarded. Information may have been quite limited, but its quality was high.

We now occupy the opposite state: information is virtually unlimited but often of very low reliability. How did this happen?

When one doesn't know, has never met, and, furthermore, shares no common interest with the individual with whom information is being shared, there is little incentive to assure the reliability of that information. Indeed, if there is personal gain to be had by providing misinformation to one's unknown targets, there is, in fact, an incentive to misinform. Wilson's altruism is claimed to have evolved in groups of approximately thirty. (Although no evidence is adduced for this number, it is clearly not wrong by a factor of ten in either direction.) However, in a target market of seventy million consumers—or seven billion—there is no incentive for altruism. If more profit—in dollars, in power, in fame—is to be gained from misinformation, why not go for it? And when dollars, power, and fame are combined

(as they often are in politics), the incentive is all the stronger. Misinformation predominates.

This book is designed as an antidote to the misinformation glut.

You are living with a brain that evolved over several million years to make simple decisions on the plains of the Serengeti: find food, avoid becoming food, and reproduce. You are living in a fast-paced, rapidly changing world dominated by modern technology. This is a challenging mismatch.

The primary drives are still there, of course, but your means of fulfilling them have altered radically. Find food: a drive-through McDonalds or a stroll through Whole Foods—no spears or snares required. Avoid becoming food: abjure climbing the fences of the zoo's lion enclosure. Reproduce: Match.com or the in vitro fertilization clinic.

The number and range of decisions you must make to satisfy these simple drives have expanded greatly. And then there are the decisions our ancestors hadn't imagined: equity mutual funds or corporate bonds for the retirement account? Radiation or chemotherapy? Waldorf or International Baccalaureate? Tea Party or Democrat? The Serengeti operating system just isn't much help. You need to invoke the new processor (the prefrontal cortex) that works more slowly but can handle more complex situations—if it has all the right apps installed. I collect those apps here: I call them scientific habits of mind.

To make wise decisions concerning finances, health, education, and politics—to even formulate well-informed opinions about these and other issues—you must own the tools required to evaluate, and validate, information for yourself. No search engine can do this for you, and relying on appeals to authority can get you into a lot of trouble. Relying on personal anecdotes is even worse. The most effective approach to all problems requiring rational analysis is to cultivate scientific habits of mind.



REPORTS

Celebration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Sister Nivedita

The following centres held various programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Sister Nivedita. **Baranagar Mission:** A panel discussion on Sister Nivedita on 2 December 2017 attended by nearly 600 students. **Barasat:** A youths' convention on 17 December attended by 650 people. **Bardhaman:** A students' convention on 10 December in which 250 students from 16 schools and 3 colleges took part. **Coimbatore Mission Vidyalaya:** A state-level Kabaddi tournament from 15 to 17 December in which 17 institutions competed. Vidyalaya's Maruthi College of Physical Education won the third prize in the tournament. **Guwahati:** A lecture programme on 28 December attended by nearly 300 devotees. A book on Sister Nivedita published by the centre in Assamese language was also released in the programme. **Hatamuniguda:** Quiz competitions from 18 to 26 November in which about 700 students and teachers participated. **Institute of Culture, Kolkata:** A two-day seminar on Sister Nivedita on 17 and 18 November, each session of which was attended by about 700 people, and an art exhibition on Sister Nivedita from 17 to 25 November which was visited by about 800 people. **Jalpaiguri:** A talk at an educational institution in Jalpaiguri on 21 December attended by 185 teachers and students. **Kankurgachhi:** Five talks from 3 to 27 December, each of which was attended by about 300 devotees. **Nagpur:** (i) A students' convention on 11 December which was attended by about 600 students and 50 teachers, and (ii) three lectures in and around Nagpur on 12 and 13 December which were attended by about 1,000 students and teachers in all. **Narendrapur:**

A devotees' convention on 10 December attended by about 300 devotees. **Rajamahendravaram:** Cultural competitions from 1 to 6 December in which 5,362 students from 43 schools took part. **Swamiji's Ancestral House:** (i) Three lectures at the centre on 27 November and 1 and 6 December which were attended by about 1,000 people, and (ii) nine lectures in and around Kolkata from 22 November to 20 December attended altogether by 3,500 people. **Moscow, Russia:** A public meeting at the Embassy of India in Moscow on 29 November which was attended by about 50 people.

Values Education and Youth Programmes

Haripad Math conducted meetings on values education at three schools on 17 and 20 November in which 428 students participated. **Vadodara** centre conducted a values education programme on 3 November which was attended by about 200 students. **Vijayawada** centre held two symposia based on the book *Personality Development*, a compilation of Swamiji's teachings, on 26 and 27 November in which 250 teachers and 330 students took part.

News of Branch Centres

On 5 December, **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ranchi Morabadi** held a conference for the executives of 120 units of Vivekananda Seva Sangha, village-level organisations formed by the former trainees of Divyayan Krishi Vigyan Kendra of the Ashrama for rural development in three districts of Jharkhand. The Chief Minister of Jharkhand, the Chief Secretary, the Agriculture Secretary and some other high officials of the Government of Jharkhand addressed the conference, which was attended by 266 people.

Srimat Swami Suhitanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the third and fourth floors of the medical centre building at **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot** on 6 December. The two new floors will house the Ashrama's Ma Sarada Cerebral Palsy and Rehabilitation Centre.

Srimat Swami Suhitanandaji Maharaj inaugurated the new monks' quarters, named Gadadhar Sant Bhavan, at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachhi** on 15 December, and a kitchen block at **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Malda** on 18 December.

A student of the school of **Ramakrishna Mission, Imphal** won a gold medal in the Asian Cup Jeet Kune Do—a martial art—Championship, held in Thailand by Asian Jeet Kune Do Federation from 24 to 28 November.

Mathrubhumi Publishing Company, Kozhikode, presented two awards to the higher secondary school, **Ramakrishna Math, Thrissur** for the school's efforts in environment protection. The awards, consisting of mementos and 75,000 rupees in all, were distributed on 2 December.

In compliance with the directions of the University Grants Commission (UGC), the name of Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University has been changed to '**Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute**' (**RKMVERI**), the name by which the institute was known earlier.


Two students of the Sanskrit Department of **RKMVERI**, Belur, won the first and fourth prizes in a Sanskrit literary competition held at New Delhi jointly by BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute, New Delhi, and Sri Somnath Sanskrit University, Veraval, Gujarat, from 15 to 17 December. All the winners received certificates, mementos, and cash prizes. In all, 1,000 students from different institutions all over India participated in the competition.

Twenty-two students of class 11 of the Vidyalaya of **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narandrapur** who had participated in the Junior Scholarship Test, 2017, conducted by Jagadish Bose National Science Talent Search, Kolkata, were awarded junior scholarship, and four other students received junior encouragement award. Besides, the school won the Best School Award for the excellent performance of its students in the competition.

Relief

Cyclone Ockhi Relief: On 29 November, the Cyclone Ockhi hit Kanyakumari and brought in its wake heavy rains and cyclonic winds, resulting in large scale damage to life and property. In response to the calamity, Chennai Math conducted relief operations at 48 tribal hamlets in the hilly areas of Kanyakumari district from 3 to 11 December. The centre served 4,200 plates of cooked food and distributed 2,800 loaves of bread, 12,500 kg rice, 2,500 kg dal, 1,250 kg semolina, 1,250 kg salt, 875 kg assorted spices, 625 litres edible oil, 2,650 kg sugar, 530 kg tea leaves, 1,250 packets of candles, and 1,250 matchboxes among 1,400 affected families of the hamlets. Further, Thiruvananthapuram centre distributed 550 kg rice, 56 kg dal, 55 kg salt, 5 kg dry chillies, 27 kg edible oil, 27 kg sugar, 5 kg tea leaves, and 55 coconuts among 55 families in Kunnathumala area in Thiruvananthapuram district on 10 December.

Disturbance Relief: Bangladesh: On 17 November, Rangpur centre distributed 14 blankets, 14 saris, and 14 lungis among 14 families affected by a social disturbance in Thakurpara area in Rangpur district.

Economic Rehabilitation: West Bengal: Raha centre distributed 6 sewing machines, 3 cycle rickshaws, and 1 cycle-trolley among poor and needy people on 14 December. 

Appeal for Human Excellence

"They alone live, who live for others" — Swami Vivekananda.

Friends and Devotees,

Situated in the mystical foothills and natural greenery and beauty of the sub Himalayan range, in 1928, some inspired devotees of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda started a new Ashrama in Jalpaiguri. In 1941, the center was affiliated to the Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math 1941 as a branch centre. In addition to serving as an abode for spiritual sadhakas, this Ashrama has been engaging itself in different philanthropic activities, including a Students Home, Value Education, Integrated Child Development project, Charitable Dispensary, Library and Reading Room, Relief and Welfare Works and others.



We humbly appeal for your generous contribution towards the construction of Vivekananda Sabha Griha (depicted above), a multipurpose hall (resembling the historic Art Institute of Chicago of 1893) with the revised estimated cost about Rs.4.66 Crores, having an area of 16,000 sq. ft with a seating capacity of more than 1300 persons. It will serve as a convention hall for students, youth, and the general public, living in

the remote areas of North Bengal, to inspire human excellence, culture, philanthropy, spirituality, and most importantly national unity.

We also wish to inform that if any donor wishes to perpetuate the memory of his/her loving one, he/she may do so by contributing an appropriate amount. We would honour the donor's desire by displaying a suitable plaque to honour the deceased. Interested donors are requested to make inquiries in this regard to the Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ashramapara, Mission Road, Jalpaiguri-735101, West Bengal, India.

Donations may be contributed either through A/C payee cheque / draft, or money order that will be thankfully accepted and acknowledged. Cheques / drafts may kindly be drawn in favour of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Jalpaiguri.

The contributions are eligible for deduction u/s 80-G of the Income Tax Act 1961.

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Your contribution will go a long way in ensuring timely completion of this noble project.
May Sri Ramakrishna shower his blessings on all your endeavour is our sincere prayer.

Jalpaiguri

9th December, 2017

Yours in the service of the Lord,

Swami Shivapremananda,
Secretary



Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama

(A branch centre of Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, Howrah: 711002)

Mission Road, Ashramapara, Jalpaiguri: 735101
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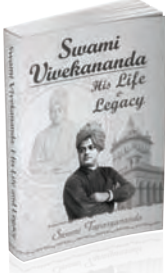
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Swami Vivekananda: His Life & Legacy Swami Tapasyananda

Swami Vivekananda's name is becoming more and more popular across the globe. However, even today many know very little about him. Some understand and adore him, some others misunderstand and misrepresent him. Who was he really? What did he do? What were his ideas and contribution to the welfare of the individual and the collective, of India and the rest of the world?

This book, authored by Revered Swami Tapasyananda Maharaj, former vice-president of the Order, powerfully and impressively answers to these questions in a nutshell.

Sankara Dig Vijaya Translated by Swami Tapasyananda

Sri Sankaracharya is one of the greatest luminaries who has enriched the spiritual and philosophical heritage of India. Through his subtle philosophical treatises and sublime devotional hymns, he has deeply touched the hearts of millions of people, both the intellectual classes and the simple masses. Among myriad versions of biographical works, Madhava-Vidyaranya's *Sankara-dig-vijaya* in Sanskrit has gained popular acceptance.



Pages 400 | Price ₹250
Packing & Postage: ₹60

This book is the English translation (with no Sanskrit text) by Swami Tapasyananda, a scholar-monk and former vice-president of the Ramakrishna Order, who has not only diligently and lucidly translated the text, but has also given a scholarly and impartial introduction mentioning the challenges in portraying Sri Sankaracharya's biography. This book will help readers acquaint themselves with a detailed and authentic biographical sketch of Sri Sankaracharya.



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We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran.

Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best.

Swami Vivekananda



ABP




An artist's impression of our proud Indian values
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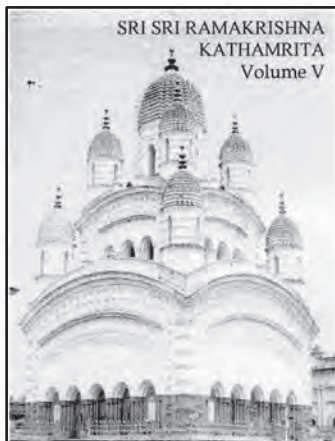
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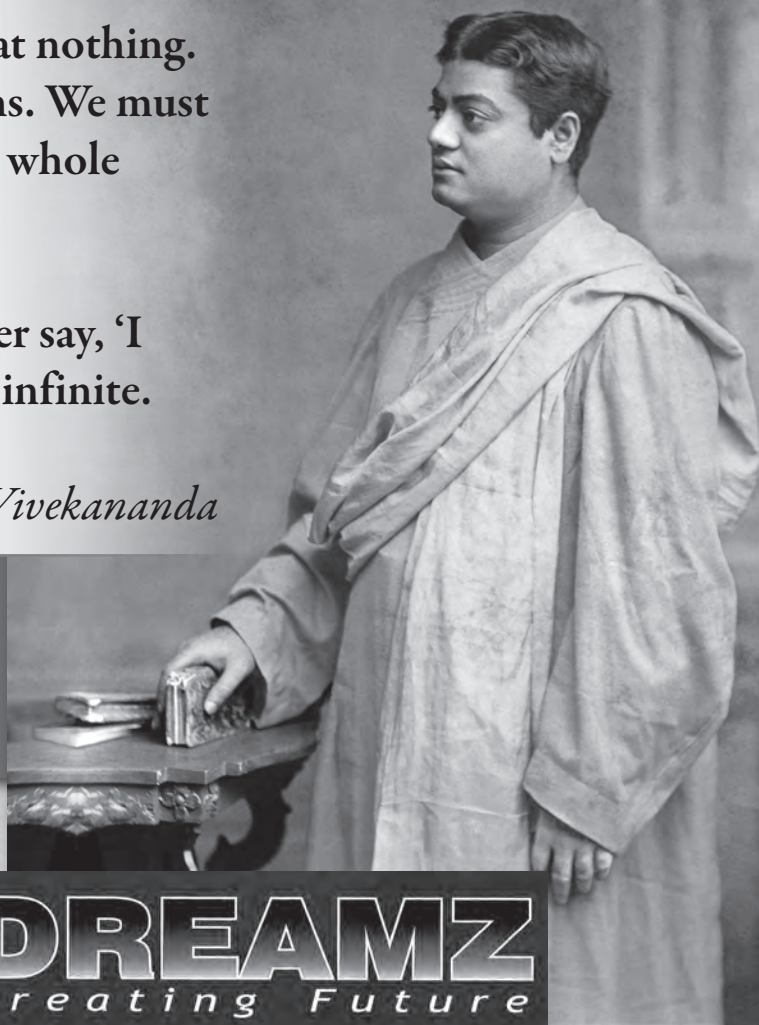
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—*Swami Vivekananda*



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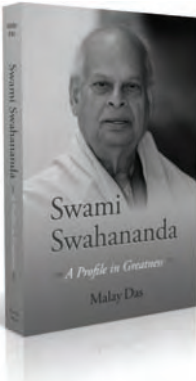
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